**INFORMATION TO USERS**

This reproduction was made from a copy of a document sent to us for microfilming. While the most advanced technology has been used to photograph and reproduce this document, the quality of the reproduction is heavily dependent upon the quality of the material submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help clarify markings or notations which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting through an image and duplicating adjacent pages to assure complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a round black mark, it is an indication of either blurred copy because of movement during exposure, duplicate copy, or copyrighted materials that should not have been filmed. For blurred pages, a good image of the page can be found in the adjacent frame. If copyrighted materials were deleted, a target note will appear listing the pages in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., is part of the material being photographed, a definite method of "sectioning" the material has been followed. It is customary to begin filming at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. If necessary, sectioning is continued again—beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. For illustrations that cannot be satisfactorily reproduced by xerographic means, photographic prints can be purchased at additional cost and inserted into your xerographic copy. These prints are available upon request from the Dissertations Customer Services Department.

5. Some pages in any document may have indistinct print. In all cases the best available copy has been filmed.

University Microfilms International
300 N. Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

8222942

Downer, Mabel Wilhelmina

CHAUCER AMONG THE VICTORIANS

*City University of New York* PH.D. 1982

University
Microfilms
International 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106

Copyright 1982

by

Downer, Mabel Wilhelmina

All Rights Reserved

# CHAUCER AMONG THE VICTORIANS

by

MABEL WILHELMINA DOWNER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1982

COPYRIGHT BY

MABEL WILHELMINA DOWNER

1982

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

March 18, 1982
date

Wendell Stacy Johnson
Chairman of Examining Committee

March 24, 1982
date

William Kelly
Executive Officer

S R Levin
Robert O. Payne
Wendell Stacy Johnson
Supervisory Committee

The City University of New York

Abstract

CHAUCER AMONG THE VICTORIANS

by

MABEL W. DOWNER

Adviser: Professor Wendell Johnson

Victorian writers frequently look back to the late Middle Ages for an ideal society. The parallels and contrasts of that age to their own made it particularly attractive to them, especially when they perceived them as a means of bringing to the attention of the leaders and the masses what had been done successfully in a situation similar to theirs in an earlier age; thus Carlyle's Past and Present. In seizing on this opportunity, writers were aware that Chaucer, the first English poet, had similarly exposed the ills of medieval society. In this respect he takes on historical importance. But he also had literary significance for them. They view his work and reflect on the very idea of him as the first major English writer in various ways. Each tends to define his own literary values and limitations, sometimes finding what he needs in the Chaucerian text and in the conception of Chaucer, like Morris and Tennyson; sometimes voicing disapproval, like Arnold and Swinburne.

The limitations in each view stem from different causes. First, the difficulty that earlier readers had in

grasping Chaucer's language and metre might have stood in the way of comprehension for even a sophisticated mid-Victorian reader or writer. Then, too, the question of moral judgement might have caused some disapproval of his matter and some forms of expression: the earlier Ruskin and even Arnold appear to be concerned over those elements of bawdy, of sexual amorality with which some later eighteenth and nineteenth-century editors dealt by suppressing some tales and bowdlerizing. They fail to submit to Chaucer's true representation of life. It is precisely for this reason that he was accused of coarseness, licentiousness, and voluptuousness.

But others praise his innovation in language and literature, his metrical ability as equivalent to the Greeks', his skill in characterization as rivalling Shakespeare's, his humour and his representation of real life as the high points of his craft.

This study seeks to present the perception of Chaucer by various major writers, and the work of late Victorians in revolutionizing the reputation and study of the great craftsman.

# Preface

Some aspects of Medievalism seem present with us even to-day. It was in the Victorian era that these aspects first began to attract attention. As a student of Medieval and British History I very early became aware of the similarities of the two periods. I was particularly fascinated with events in nineteenth-century England that seemed to be a repetition of events that had occurred in the Middle Ages, and was eager to know more. The result was a thesis titled "The Common Man" in Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century England.

When I turned to literature I discovered that Victorian writers, too, had great interest in the Middle Ages. It was in a graduate seminar at Hunter College, that I first decided that if ever I should have the opportunity to write a dissertation, it would be on Medievalism in Victorian literature.

The time came, but the topic seems too large for a dissertation. I must modify my expectation. With the guidance of an able adviser, I was able to overcome much difficulty. Caroline Spurgeon's monumental work, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, provided a valuable source. It was interesting to see how great minds could differ in their evaluation of a great artist.

Quite a few persons have contributed to my achievement so far--Professors Norman Harrington and Peter Spielberg of Brooklyn College first gave me the confidence to pursue doctoral studies; Professors Allen Mandelbaum, Morton Cohen and Sam Levin who provided kindly and useful advice in difficult situations; Professor Martin Steven who guided me towards a decision on the topic in the absence of others. I acknowledge with gratitude their interest and support. To Professor Wendell Johnson, my adviser, for his patience and understanding in guiding me through this strenuous period, I owe a lasting debt of gratitude.

My thanks go also to the Staff of the New York Public Library and to our own Library Staff here at the Graduate Center for their kind assistance in various ways.

M.W.D.

# CONTENTS


| | Page |
|---|---|
| PREFACE . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | vi |
| INTRODUCTION . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 1 |
| Chapters | |
| I. VICTORIAN RESPONSES TO CHAUCER. . . . . . . . | 12 |
| II. ARNOLD'D VIEW OF CHAUCER. . . . . . . . . . . | 37 |
| III. MORRIS'S USE OF CHAUCER . . . . . . . . . . . | 55 |
| IV. SWINBURNE'S JUDGMENT OF CHAUCER . . . . . . . | 80 |
| V. TENNYSON'S HOMAGE TO CHAUCER. . . . . . . . . | 92 |
| VI. RUSKIN'S INTERPRETATION OF CHAUCER. . . . . . | 102 |
| CONCLUSION . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 122 |
| APPENDIX . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 140 |
| BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . | 147 |

# INTRODUCTION

It is a commonplace that Victorian writers look back to the Medieval period for models of greatness.[1] I have chosen the greatest medieval author for a study, with a view to discovering how he was perceived by Victorians, and what impact he had on them. It will be necessary to trace briefly any decline or enhancement of his reputation during the Victorian years and find out what factors aided or hindered such development.

The importance of Chaucer to Victorian writers can be explained in several related ways. First, the Victorian age, concerned as it was with the idea of historical development and social change more than any age since the fourteenth century, parallels the age of Chaucer in many interesting respects: the change from an agrarian to an industrial society with its frequent lack of concern for the working class,

---

[1]It is important at this point to define the terms "Medieval" and "Victorian" as they will be employed in this study. Although the Middle Ages, according to Cellarius, a German Protestant annalist who appears to have been the first to use _medii aevi_ in its present sense in the seventeenth century (Alice S. Miskimin, _The Renaissance Chaucer_ [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975], p. 12), extends from the fall of Constantine to the fall of Constantinople (340-1453 A.D.), this study will be concerned mainly with the final period--from the late thirteenth century to the early fifteenth--and with the earlier period only in a general way. The Victorian age, though supposedly covering the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) is for the purpose of literary history sometimes extended to 1832-1914.

resulting in grievances that led to revolutionary movements (the Reform movements beginning in 1832 and the Chartist movements of the 1840s), compares to the break-up of Feudalism and the attendant changes in the social structure leading to similar popular discontent and finally to revolution (the Peasants' Revolt of 1381).

Next, the Victorian sense of historical development includes Chaucer's emerging as a crucial "father figure" of English literature. He was praised by his contemporaries and honoured as "first poet" in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[2] But for the nineteenth century, with its new awareness of cultural ancestry and growth--of its own roots --Chaucer can be almost the mythic type or model for "the English poet."

Self-conscious Victorians often turn to the late Middle Ages to find not only models for, but also telling contrasts with the nineteenth century: Carlyle searches for

---

[2]This is not to overlook such influential writers as William Langland and John Gower, who wrote for some of the same reasons and about some of the same problems as Chaucer, but Chaucer seems to have done most to establish a language for every Englishman, a vernacular, and also to present the historical development (so similar to those that were later to occur in Victorian England) more effectively when he paints in literary terms such a picture of contemporary life as no other man ever painted; while in his skilful handling of the fabliaux he has brought literature into the domain of the common man, thus enabling him to participate in the events of the time as well as enjoy some of what was later conceived to be less noble aspects of the culture. Victorian writers, too, Thomas Carlyle, John Henry Newman, Charles Dickens, for instance, feel the need to air the grievances of a changing society through literature and reach the masses through tracts and serializing of books, thus bringing the concerns of the country to the understanding of the working man and woman.

leaders, Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites for examples in painting, architecture and handicraft, Tennyson and Morris for models and subjects in literature. Chaucer can present in part a high, often unrealistic, ideal of the late thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. But to some there are difficulties in the use of Chaucer as ideal and in the understanding of his poetry. He takes on various meanings and thus became a problem to evangelical "moralists" like Ruskin, and even to Arnold.

Finally, there is a need for understanding Chaucer's text, for placing just the right meaning on what he says, since ideas and uses of him are so varied. Victorians do not all agree in their opinions of him, partly because of problems in the language which has led to misreading, partly because of limited reading and therefore limited knowledge. The founding late in the century of the Chaucer Society (1868), along with scholarly efforts to discover the true Chaucer text leads to a better understanding and a fairer evaluation of him. Still, we are left with the problem of trying to reconcile the various opinions with what seems to modern scholars to be a just estimate of Chaucer.

## II

## The Middle Ages and the Victorians

It was in the nineteenth century that fascination with Medievalism reached a climax, and it was the Victorians

who, apparently because of possible similarities and apparent contrasts between current conditions and events and those that existed in the Middle Ages, sought to call attention to the present through the past. Problems in government, in the Church, mobility within the class system, the position of women, but particularly in master-worker relationships in the emerging industrial state, were all questions raised in the earlier age and (in some cases) they seem to have been dealt with more satisfactorily than was being done in contemporary England. The Industrial Revolution and the emergence of a new moneyed class have created a condition analogous to that of Medieval England--one of similar exploitation of the poor by the rich, worker by master, all with the absence of that earlier medieval faith which affirms man's duty to accept his lot within the universal order and make a virtue of necessity.[3] As in the past, writers believe themselves the organ for the expression of the will or concerns of the people; thus we have Carlyle's Past and Present advocating strong leadership, bemoaning the loss of human relationship and alienation as expressed in the story of the Irish widow who could prove her membership in humanity only by infecting

---

[3]It is not only the hunger, disease, the exploitation of the worker that are expressed by Victorian writers, but a sense of the loss of connection with society itself, in contrast to the familial and patriarchal connection in the Middle Ages. In the master-worker relationship then, there was a link by reciprocal ties: farmers and fieldhands dined together; the servant felt he had a claim on the master's bacon and bread and he in turn gave ungrudging service. These are absent in Victorian England.

seventeen of her neighbours with typhus; Ruskin's outrage against the obsession with materialism and the accumulation of wealth as expressed in Unto This Last and Munera Pulveris, and the need for government involvement in industry to solve labour problems, unemployment, and the needs of the poor; Dickens's portrayal of the sufferings of the poor, of children and women in Hard Times, Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Bleak House; John Mill's idea in The Subjection of Women; all are biased against machinery and the mechanizing of life.

Victorians seem to have discovered Chaucer first through their fascination with medieval art and feudalism, and second, through Chaucer's portrayal of medieval life. But not all Victorians perceive him as the great poet he is considered to be by twentieth-century readers; and for different reasons: they have inherited unfavourable attitudes toward his work as unedifying,[4] his language as obsolete, his style as rough and unpolished, his metre as halting;[5] he

---

[4]'Canterbury Tales' seems very early to have been used as a term of contempt, meaning either a story with no truth in it, or a vain and scurrilous tale. This sixteenth-century view gradually gained ground and finally it completely obliterated the aspect of Chaucer as a great reformer, a view that was held earlier (Caroline Spurgeon, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion [New York: Russell and Russell, 1960], Vol. I, p. xxi).

[5]His versification is not, apparently, understood by anyone; the secret of it is said to have been lost when inflexions were lost; no one seems to have been aware of the pronunciation of the final 'e' with the result that there was a general agreement that the poet's verse was 'harsh' and 'irregular' (Spurgeon, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, Vol. I, p. xxv).

needs to be Latinized and modernized. Yet some hail him as a great poet. These, too, are inheritors of tradition, but they view him positively, claiming that he was, as he had been called earlier, "firste findere of oure faire langage," 'rose of rethoris all," "chief poete of Bretayne," "souereyn Poete," "father of our splendid English poetry," "well of English undefiled." These two opposing attitudes are reflected in the Chaucer tradition throughout the centuries, and they coexist in the Victorian age.

## III

## Chaucer and the Victorians: Visionary Form

Like his contemporaries (Langland and Gower, for instance), and even anonymous predecessors, Chaucer followed the conventional dream-poem or love-vision form, the customary medium used by medieval writers to express an opinion guardedly, or to conceal identity, or to present truth in fantastic form. Alfred Tennyson, too, resorts to this technqiue briefly in writing "A Dream of Fair Women." William Morris enters a dream-world to express his dissatisfaction with the unsatisfactory conditions of society and his resulting search for an "earthly paradise." He makes it clear that his rhyme, his archaisms, and his repeated tales are meant to induce a dream state in a "sleepy region," a statement which recalls the conventional medium used by Chaucer in the dream-vision poems.

Like Chaucer, then, some Victorians are faced with the problem of finding a medium for expressing social problems in contemporary England. Morris abandons his prose style for thirty years (after discovering Chaucer) to pursue poetry, which he considers more flexible and wide-ranging for his ideas. But the chief resolution for Victorian writers lies in their turning to the Middle Ages in general and in some cases to Chaucer specifically for a way of reconciling their art with their subject; thus Carlyle's Past and Present, Ruskin's Seven Lamps of Architecture, Morris's The Defence of Quenevere, The Life and Death of Jason, and The Earthly Paradise, and Tennyson's Idylls of the King.

## Chaucer and the Victorians: Language

No other factor played so great a part in the vicissitude of Chaucer's reputation as the mutability of the English language. In spite of the high regard in which he was held by his contemporaries and fifteenth-century writers, especially the Scottish Chaucerians,[6] by the sixteenth century Chaucer's Middle English had so changed that Speght saw the necessity to include in his 1598 and 1602 editions of Chaucer's Works a separate glossary of obsolete and difficult words as an aid to readers. As 'auctor' Chaucer must be understood.

[6]John Gower calls him his disciple; Lydgate terms him "Cheef Poete of breteyne," "Myn Auctor," "souereyn Poete"; Dunbar, "The Noble Chaucer, of Makaris flour," "rose of rethoris all"; Hoccleve, "flour of eloquence," and Douglas recognizes him as his superior.

At this time various responses to Chaucer's supposed antique diction and rugged versification came from various groups: favourable references, condemnation, and even compromise; for some ascribed the faults attributed to Chaucer, to lack of intelligence on the readers' part, or negligence of the scribes, a view that Dryden was later to denounce.[7] As one writer notes,

> Our good old Chaucer some despise: and why?
> Because say they he writeth barbarously.
> Blame him not (Ignorants) but your selves, that do
> Not at these Years your native language know.

From the end of the sixteenth to the early seventeenth century, even his supporters had to acknowledge his language as obsolete. But just about the time when it was often thought that Chaucer's fame was almost dead because few could understand what he wrote, a recognition on the part of some writers that the instability of the language would soon cause the writing of one age to be unintelligible to succeeding generations led to a wave of translations of many great authors; and this option was considered by Chaucer enthusiasts like Sir Francis Kynaston and Dr. William King, who proceeded to translate his works into Latin.[8]

---

[7]'Tis true, I cannot go so far as he who publish'd the last Edition of him; for he would make us believe the Fault is in our Ears, and that there were really Ten Syllables in a Verse where we could find but Nine: but this Opinion is not worth confuting; 'tis so gross and obvious an Errour, that common Sense . . . must convince the Reader, that Equality of Numbers, in every Verse which we call Heroick, was either not known, or not always practised in Chaucer's Age.

[8]Chaucer had anticipated changes in this direction

Another effort to rescue him from the state of decline was made by two of the great writers of the eighteenth century: Dryden and Pope.[9] These two raised public consciousness to the merit of Chaucer's work, and to encourage reading of the great artist, sustain interest in him, and perpetuate his fame, they proceeded to translate him into current language. The modernized versions left much to be desired, but they did accomplish one end: many more people were able to, and did, read Chaucer. This effort on the part of Dryden and Pope opened the way to other such projects by Wordsworth, Ogle, Betterton, and Lipscombe.

A turning point to a better understanding of Chaucer's work was Tyrwhitt's edition of The Canterbury Tales in 1775 with its explanatory prefatory essay which

---

when toward the end of Troilus and Criseyde, in sending his 'litel booke' to the world, he comments:

> And for ther is so gret diversite
> In Englissh and in writying of oure tonge,
> So prey I God that non myswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge.
> And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
> And thow be understonde, God I biseche!
> (1793-1798)

All references to Chaucer's works in this study are from The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. F. N. Robinson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961). Second Edition.

[9]But even Dryden was aware of some of the faults perceived in Chaucer's works, despite his praise for him. He notes that Chaucer's verse is not harmonious in spite the fact that his contemporaries and fifteenth-century writers thought it musical. "[He] is a rough Diamond, and must first be polish'd e'er he shines." His method of polishing was to translate him into current language which, too, was another way of perpetuating Chaucer's fame.

substituted a scholarly appreciation of Chaucer's wisdom, humour, poetic imagination and technical and artistic skill for the erroneous views held of him due to ignorance of the language and the work. But the real breakthrough came with Furnivall and the founding of the Chaucer Society in 1868, with which modern Chaucer scholarship begins. Later Victorian writers, therefore, came to Chaucer with a greater advantage than writers of any other period since his own, having the benefit of more than three hundred years of Chaucer observation and studies dating from Francis Thynne's edition of the poet's work in 1532. This may be one reason that some Victorians are able to appreciate the idea of the man and his work, some like Morris to imitate and adopt, others like Ruskin and Tennyson to interpret and admire, because they have understood. Certain mid-Victorian critics, like Matthew Arnold, have reservations in their admiration and praise because they lack the benefit of the later scholarship, and for other reasons of bias and limited reading deny him the highest rank among poets. But later writers down to our day seem more inclined through greater understanding to give Chaucer a fairer evaluation.

This study will explore the Victorian reputation of Chaucer and his ideas. Attention will be given to the opinions of such poets and critics as Matthew Arnold, John Ruskin, William Morris, Charles Swinburne, Robert and Mrs. Browning, and Alfred Tennyson, who seem to have had more to say than others, as well as to some who, while not considered

critics or imitators, have in one way or another expressed reactions to the poet's work. Matters of subject, style, language will be explored, critical judgments will be examined, and comparisons will be made where possible and profitable.

# CHAPTER ONE

## VICTORIAN RESPONSES TO CHAUCER

There is hardly a Victorian writer who has not made passing reference to Chaucer, some with enthusiasm. In fact, the enthusiasm of the Pre-Raphaelites for him is so great that in addition to painting scenes from his life and poems, they see a physical likeness of him in the people they admire: for example, friends of Morris, Dante Rossetti, and Richard Watson Dixon find a resemblance of them to Chaucer in the Occleve portrait,[1] and in Ford Madox Brown's Chaucer at the Court of Edward III, Chaucer's figure is painted from Dante Rossetti's portrait, so great is considered that resemblance.[2] Paintings that survive include Dixon's A Wedding Scene from Chaucer,[3] Burne-Jones's The Prioresses Tale,[4]

---

[1]William M. Rosetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti: his family Letters, 1895, 2 Vols., Vol. 1, p. 170; H. C. Beeching also, notes that 'Dixon had a great look of Chaucer as he appears in Hoccleve's portrait, and the resemblance was more than external, reaching to a characteristic and humorous interest in all sorts and conditions of people' (D.N.B., 1st Supplement, Vol. II, 1901, p. 140).

[2]F. M. Hueffer's, Ford Madox Brown, 1896, p. 71.

[3]Beeching, D.N.B., p. 139.

[4]This is a painting in oil on a cabinet belonging to William Morris, representing the Virgin placing the grain on the "little clergeon's" tongue.

Cupid's Forge,[5] Designs to illustrate "The Legend of Good Women,"[6] The Dream of Good Women,[7] and Chaucer's Dream.[8]

The Pre-Raphaelites and their circle might think themselves imitators of Chaucer in the sense that they go back to nature and paint exact likeness as Chaucer did in literary terms.[9] But they also praise and adapt him. R. W. Dixon in "The Crosses of Love" uses Chaucer as a model. The narrator is a garrulous old monk, and his word pictures of lovely ladies and gallant knights in the vein of "A Legend of Good Women" foreshadow the subsequent style of Morris in The Earthly Paradise, itself modelled on Chaucer's Canterbury Tales.

William Rossetti ascribes to Chaucer the perfection of the English language and the perfection of English poetry.

---

[5]This painting in water-colour illustrates the opening of The Parlement of Foules (Malcolm Bell, Sir. E. Burne-Jones, 1894, pp. 30, 31).

[6]Some of these were done in glass by Morris in 1864, and are at Peterhouse, Cambridge, as also is a portrait of Chaucer, designed by Burne-Jones in 1874 (See M. Bell, Sir E. Burne-Jones, 1899, p. 32).

[7]This is on a stained glass window at Peterhouse, Cambridge.

[8]This water-colour illustrates the non-Chaucerian Isle of Ladies. A larger and much altered version was painted in 1871.

[9]"With Chaucer it is always the thing itself, and not the description of it that is the main object"; he is the first to break away from the traditional style and give not merely stories, but lively pictures of real life as the ever-renewed substance of poetry (James Russell Lowell, My Study Window, The Writings of James Russell Lowell, Riverside edition, 10 Vols., 1890-91, Vol. III, pp. 324-325). The Pre-Raphaelites, too, broke away from a tradition to put a stamp of their own on a new path.

Agreeing with those who consider Chaucer the first English poet, he goes far beyond them as he claims that there was no "authentically great writer in the English tongue before [him]" either in poetry or in prose; that Chaucer found a literature, raised a language from the spoken and written to the literary condition, gave it a name and a place among the languages which promote, and which partly constitute civilization, thus achieving glory for his country and himself.[10] Chaucer has perfected and given us the English language after it had undergone three hundred years of association with the French; that is, from the time of the Norman conquest. This was entirely a part of historical development, a process that Walter Landor and Arthur Clough are later to recognize in their assessment and praise.[11]

Rossetti imputes to Chaucer the perfection of English poetry: it was long under the influence of romantic French models, and the more recent influence of Italian sources. Chaucer's introduction of French and Italian elements into English is condemned, however, by Swinburne,[12] even though it was through these borrowings that Chaucer was able to

---

[10]William Rossetti, "Geoffrey Chaucer," Lives of Famous Poets (London: Ward, Lock, and Co., 1878), pp. 3-18.

[11]See pages 26, 27, 29 below.

[12]Chaucer's excessive borrowings from abroad make his work appear to be that of the French or Italian tongue speaking with Teutonic accent through English lips. He was in the main "a French or Italian poet lined thoroughly and warmly throughout with the substance of an English humorist" ("Short Notes on English Poets" the Fortnightly Review, 1880, pp. 708-710).

enrich and perfect English poetry: the introduction and use of the heroic metre (as found in French and Italian poetry) for the first time was one source of such enrichment. While admitting Chaucer's lack of invention, Rossetti credits him with originality of spirit, as he introduces into poetry "a breadth and variety in the portrayal of social life, a play of passion and emotion, a sweetness and richness of colouring, a genuine thorough humanity, which cannot be matched in any preceding author." He lauds his poetic touch and mastery, the music of his perceptions, the kindly humour with which he draws his characters, a humour possessed only by one who has experienced life in all its aspects and with keen and sympathetic observance. He praises the freshness of Chaucer's work and his ability to make even what is obsolete (the age of chivalry for instance) alive and forever young in his pages--a reference to _Troilus and Criseyde_, presumably--and concludes that he will remain vital as long as his poetry lives--a "dateless" time indeed--even with his use of an archaic tongue.[13]

Rossetti singles out the greatest of Chaucer's works --the _Troilus_ and _The Canterbury Tales_--for commendation. The former is an "entire and perfect chrysolite," he writes. In the Prefatory Remarks to his translation of that poem, he pays tribute to the medieval poet: "we still thank him for presenting English readers with one of the most delightful of

---

[13]Rossetti, _Lives of Famous Poets_, p. 14.

English or of possible poems." It is "peculiarly memorable and unfailingly fascinating," "combining in itself at once the very topmost blossom and crown of the chivalric passion and gallantry, and the exquisite first-fruits of that humorous study of character in which our national writers have so specially excelled." This very quality culminating in The Canterbury Tales is precisely the same that is later seen in Shakespeare: "there was no improving upon the quality of character-painting exhibited in The Canterbury Tales, and fore-shown, with no inferior power, in the Pandarus of Troylus and Crysede." Rossetti is careful to point out that this quality was first developed by Chaucer, and continued by Shakespeare, as Landor has earlier expressed the similar view that Shakespeare built on the foundations of Chaucer: "Chaucer first united the two glorious realms of Italy and England. Shakespeare came after, and subjected the whole universe to his dominion. But he mounted the highest steps of his throne under those bland skies which had warmed the congenial breasts of Chaucer and Boccaccio."[14]

Rossetti is aware of Chaucer's debt to Boccaccio in this poem, but even as he is willing to give Boccaccio credit, he is careful not to rob Chaucer of his due: the chivalric passion and the gallantry in the poem are derived from Boccaccio, and the humorous study of character comes from Chaucer. Yet it is Chaucer's beauty, spirit, and tenderness

---

[14] Imaginary Conversations, ed. Charles G. Crump (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1891), 6 Vols., Vol. IV, pp. 274-275.

of treatment that compensates for the monotony and diffusiveness caused by the passion and the gallantry which are Boccaccio's contribution. Chaucer allows love to assume the form of gallantry and intrigue even while the core and essence of it is passion--"life-long and consuming in Troylus," "quick-flaming and transient" in Criseyde;[15] and after the troubles of Troilus are over he rises superior to the false loves and poor passions and pride of a low world, and beholds the better end of existence.[16]

Rossetti's praise for The Canterbury Tales is even more extravagant than that for the Troilus: it is a wellspring of pathos, pleasantry, and delight, a mine of character and social life. He echoes Dryden,[17] William Blake,[18]

---

[15]Prefatory Remarks to Chaucer's Troylus and Crysede compared with Boccaccio's Filostrato, trans. William Michael Rossetti (London: Published for the Chaucer Society by N. Trubner and Co., 1873), p. viii.

[16]William Watkiss Lloyd, "Critical Essay on Troilus and Cressida" The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare, ed. S. W. Singer (London: Bell and Daldy, 1868), 10 Vols., Vol. VII, p. 319.

[17]See pp. 43-44, note 15 below.

[18]"The characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations. As one age falls, another rises, different to mortal eyes, but to immortals only the same; for we see the same characters repeated again and again, . . . Of Chaucer's characters, as described in The Canterbury Tales, some of the names or titles are altered by time; but the characters themselves for ever remain unaltered, and consequently they are the physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life, . . . Names alter; things never alter."
(Quote from Blake in Rossetti's Lives of Famous Poets, pp. 14-15.)

Samuel Butler[19] among others when he announces the agelessness of Chaucer's characters, the identity of each person to them and to the pilgrimage, and the non-exempt status of each mortal:

> Chaucer's characters live age after age. Every age is a Canterbury Pilgrimage: We all pass on, each sustaining one or other of these characters, nor can a child be born who is not one of these characters of Chaucer. . . .[20]

Rossetti answers also to the [illegible] of the humour and fun that accompanied the journey. He does this in a way interpretative of the spirit of the time. As a father, master, or superior does not always look with severity on the follies of the child, servant, or subordinate, but at times with pleasantries, so also Chaucer must include humour and fun if he is depicting reality.

Chaucer's poems will always be famous and revered, Rossetti concludes. He has left no poetic successor in England who could so much as tread in his steps.

Dante Gabriel Rossetti, though not as involved with Chaucer as his brother William, is aware of the poet's merits. He credits Chaucer with two important contributions to English literature: that "spiritual contact" (the poet identifying himself with his reader more than any other ideal personality) which is found in few poets in pure perfection (Shakespeare, Byron, Burns, and Morris among the few), and his introducing into English the ancient allegory on man's

---

[19] See p. 72, note 24 below.

[20] Lives of Famous Poets, p. 15.

pilgrimage of life when he puts the following lines in the mouth of Theseus:

> This world nys but a thurghfare of wo,
> And we ben pilgrymes, passynge to and fro.
> ("The Knight's Tale," ll. 2847-2848)

Elizabeth Barrett Browning, in her discriminating and enthusiastic praise, places Chaucer in the highest rank of poets. Her essay in the Athenaeum (1842) seems to address almost all the critical aspects of the man and his work. Like many before her, she hails him the first English poet and does so in the most charming language. She writes,

> . . . it is with Chaucer that we begin our 'Book of the poets.' . . . And the genius of the poet shares the character of his position--: he was made for an early poet, and the metaphors of dawn and spring doubly become him. A morningstar, a lark's exaltation, cannot usher in a glory better. The "cheerful morning face," "the breezy call of incense-breathing morn," you recognize in his countenance and voice.

She calls him a prophet:

> [His] is a voice full of promise and prophecy. He is the good omen of our poetry, the "good bird," according to the Romans, "the best good angel of the spring," the nightingale, according to his own creed of good luck, heard before the cuckoo.

He is the greatest of our poets:

> . . . it is with Chaucer we touch the true height, and look abroad into the kingdoms and glories of our political literature.

She even ranks him "King" (presumably over all poets):[21]

> Up rose the sunne, and uprose Emilie, and uprose her poet, the first of a line of kings, conscious of

---

[21] In this she is in accord with William Rossetti who names Chaucer the "sovereign of English poesy in his own time and for some two centuries following, and not to be ever wholly dethroned" (Lives of Famous Poets, p. 18).

> futurity in his smile. He is a king and inherits the earth, and expands his great soul smilingly to enhance his great heritage.

She examines his character:

> Nothing is too high for him to touch with a thought, nothing too low to dower with an affection. . . . His senses are open and delicate, like a young child's. . . . Childlike, too, his tears and smiles lie at the edge of his eyes.

She evaluates his work:

> . . . because his imagination is neither too "high fantastical" to refuse proudly the gravitation of the earth, nor too "light of love" to lose it carelessly, he can create as well as dream, and work with clay as well as cloud,--and when his men and women stand close by the actual ones, your stop-watch shall reckon no difference in the beating of their hearts.

She reconciles his art with nature and reality:

> He knew the secret of nature and art,--that truth is beauty,--and saying "I will make 'A Wife of Bath' as well as Emilie, and you shall remember her as long," we do remember her as long.

And she declares his immortality:

> . . . he sent us a train of pilgrims, each with a distinct individuality apart from the pilgrimage, all the way from Southwark and the Tabard Inn, to Canterbury and Becket's shrine; and their laughter comes near to an end, and their talk goes on with the stars, and all the railroads which may intersect the spoilt earth for ever, cannot hush the "tramp, tramp" of their horses' feet.[22]

Defending him from the charge of baseness in his poetry,[23] she notes that "the poetical faculty, which expresses the highest moods of the mind, passes naturally to the

---

[22] The Book of the Poets, the Athenaeum, 1842, p. 498.

[23] One such charge is made by Cardinal Wiseman in his lectures "On the Perception of Natural Beauty" in which he accuses Chaucer and Spenser of associating natural beauty with "wantonness, voluptuousness, and debauchery" (Correspondence, 1862, Vol. ii, pp. 240, 264).

highest objects," and questions whether Dante, Tasso, Petrarch, Calderon or Chaucer can separate them, or did separate them. She seems to be saying that in so far as Chaucer's topics represent the highest outpouring of his mind they cannot be considered base. She concludes that with all his jubilee of spirit and resounding laughter, Chaucer has the name of Jesus Christ and God as frequently to familiarity on his lips as a child has his father's name.[24]

In her defence of Chaucer's "true music" against those who maintained that he wrote bad accent only, she states her belief that Chaucer wrote on precisely the same metrical principles as the Greek poets, and that "you who are musicians [in Chaucer Modernized] ought to have sung it out loud in the ears of the public."[25] As a necessary support of her defence one might look back to an earlier statement of hers:

> It has appeared to me that a trochee introduced before the last foot (supposing the last foot to be an iambus) produces an agreeable relief from the monotony of the usual heroic structure. The following examples from Chaucer's Knight's Tale are among the most melodius I can recollect--
> "And sōlītārie hĕ wās ēvĕre ăllōne,
> And wāīllўnge āl thĕ nўght mākўnge hĭs mōne."[26]
> (1365-1366)

She thus identifies him with the Greek poets. Moreover, she equates him with the greatest of them, Homer, in quite an

---

[24]"Letter to John Kenyon," March 25, 1843, The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1897, Vol. 1, p. 128.

[25]Letter, 12 May, 1845, The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to R. H. Horne, ed. S. R. Townshend Mayer, 1877, 2 Vols., Vol. II, p. 176.

unusual way: Having made some alterations in her bedroom, she describes it thus to Mrs. Martin:

> No, you would certainly never recognise my prison if you were to see it. . . . And Chaucer's and Homer's busts on guard over those two departments of English and Greek poetry.[27]

It seems interesting that though some are inclined to place Chaucer below Shakespeare at one time, below Milton the next time, for Mrs. Browning it is Chaucer who represents English poetry. Interesting also is the fact that in her evaluation she has touched on almost all the aspects of Chaucer that have been adversely criticized--morals, language, metrics, status--and has concluded that his genius transcends such criticism. In her analysis of Wordsworth, she makes an observation worthy of attention:

> Chaucer and Burns made the most of a day, but left it a day; Mr. Wordsworth leaves it transformed into his thoughts.

In this she seems to sum up her view of Chaucer's realistic portrayal of nature and life.

Possibly Elizabeth Barrett Browning finds in the medieval poet some of those qualities she admires in her husband's art. For Robert Browning shows similarities with Chaucer. Walter Landor seems to imply this in one of his verse epistles to Browning:

---

[26] Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Hitherto Unpublished Poems and Stories (Boston: Bibliophile Society, 1914), 2 Vols., Vol. II, pp. 67-68.

[27] "Letter to Mrs. Martin," May 26, 1843, Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1897, Vol. 1, p. 143.

> . . . Since Chaucer was alive and hale,
> No man hath walkt along our roads with step
> So active, so inquiring eye, or tongue
> So varied in discourse. . . .[28]

Landor is here comparing Browning to Chaucer in the variety of his imagery and his ability to reveal the hearts of various, actual men and women--as in The Canterbury Tales.

Browning, like Chaucer, treats with sympathy what seems to call for reproof; so Lippo Lippi and the lovers in "Respectability" indicate. As Chaucer seems not to condemn the activities of Troilus and Criseyde, Browning in these two poems paints a realistic picture of natural love, ungoverned by institutionalized bands, does not condemn, but seems rather to commend it for its naturalness. Both poets support this recognition: Paint the world as you see it! And both are subject to unfavourable criticism for their realistic view of life. "The world and life's too big to pass for a dream," says Lippi. He shows that in departing from tradition one sometimes produces reality.

> For me, I think I speak as I was taught;
> I always see the garden and God there
> A-making man's wife: and, my lesson learned,
> The value and significance of flesh,
> I can't unlearn ten minutes afterwards (265-269).

This and a similar idea in "Respectability" echo Chaucer's unspoken view in Troilus and Criseyde and "The Merchant's Tale." Chaucer perhaps would have agreed with Lippo's desire to paint "man, woman, child . . . do as well as say.

---

[28]"To Robert Browning," Works, 1846, Vol, ii, p. 673; Poems, ed. C. G. Crump, 2 Vols., 1892, 2 Vols.

. . . Just as they are . . . and count it crime/To let a truth slip (283-296); for he in his word-painting does not "let a truth slip." He accords with Browning's statement:

> Art remains the one way possible
> Of speaking truth to mouths like mine, at least
> (The Ring and the Book, XII, 832-833)

--for this he realized in The Canterbury Tales.

Like Chaucer, Browning deals with different levels of love (for instance, four levels in "Pippa Passes") and shows adulterous love as the most dramatic, but Divine Love the greatest. Similarly, Divine love emerges as the work's culmination after the adulterous drama of the Troilus.

Another instance of Chaucer's possible influence on Browning appears in "Childe Roland." The resemblance between the old cripple of this work and the "olde man" of Chaucer's "Pardoner's Tale" strengthens the link between Roland's guide and death.

Landor's statement concerning Chaucer and Browning can also be applied to Kipling because of his excitement and pleasure in so many different kinds of people and in so dazzling a variety of scene as this world affords. Richard Roberts sees a likeness in Chaucer, Browning, and Kipling, all men of great invention and observant imagination. According to him, their figures rarely have any reality greater than that of actual life and they exist in the circumstances and conditions their creators make for them, and not outside these conditions.

Walter Landor, though often not considered a Victorian, lived so far into that age (1775-1864) that he might be considered a part of the period. He places Chaucer in the highest rank of poets. Again and again he compares Chaucer with other poets and always finds Chaucer superior. He considers Burns and Keats the only two poets who resemble Chaucer: Chaucer's accuracy and truth in describing the manners of common life are seen in Burns, but Burns has parts of genius which Chaucer has not in the same degree; while the animated and pathetic Keats, in his Endymion, is richer in imagery.[29] Spenser is unequal to Chaucer even in imagination, and very inferior in all other points excepting harmony. This latter Landor attributes to the age in which they lived rather than to Chaucer.[30] Elsewhere, there is . . . a freshness [in Keats] such as we feel in the glorious dawn of Chaucer. Nevertheless, he rates the poets in this order: Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats.

In 1861 he compares Chaucer to Homer:

> There is no poet excepting Homer whom I have studied so attentively as Chaucer. They are the ablest of their respective countries.

Elsewhere he places Chaucer next to Shakespeare and Milton and prefers him to Spenser. By 1863 he was to crave Chaucer's presence:

---

[29] Imaginary Conversations, Vol. VI, p. 45n.

[30] Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 274.

Chaucer, O how I wish thou wert
Alive and, as of yore, alert!
(_Heroic Idylls_, p. 142)

He sings the praises of the poet:

Chaucer I always loved, for he
Led me to woo fair Poesie.
He of our craft the worthy foreman,
Stood gallantly against the Norman,
And in good humour tried to teach
Reluctant churls our native speech.
(_Heroic Idylls_, p. 224)

Landor seems also to be commenting on Chaucer's style when, in 1858, he expresses his admiration in "Old-fashioned Verse":

In verse alone I ran not wild
When I was hardly more than child,
Contented with the native lay
Of Pope or Prior, Swift or Gay . . .
Then listened I to Spencer's train,
Till Chaucer's Canterbury train
Came trooping past, and carried me
In more congenial company.
Soon my soul was hurried o'er
This bright scene: the "solemn roar"
Of organ, under Milton's hand,
Struck me mute . . .
("Old-fashioned Verse," _Dry Sticks_, p. 44)

The last three lines of this verse seem a commentary on what Arnold calls the "grand style severe" exemplified here by Milton, one favouring Chaucer's simple, humourous, low one.

Then Landor speaks of Chaucer's immortality:

Chaucer I fancied had been dead
Some centuries, some four or five;
By fancy I have been misled
Like many: he is yet alive.
(_Heroic Idylls_, p. 270)

But of the many interesting statements of Landor, two of them seem particularly relevant to this study: "Chaucer first united the two glorious realms of Italy and

England,"[31] and

> And in good humour tried to teach
> Reluctant churls our native speech.

It seems ironic that Landor is praising Chaucer for precisely the same matter for which he has been blamed specifically by Swinburne and indirectly by Arnold and others. For Swinburne, Chaucer has borrowed so much from the French and the Italians that he is in the main "a French or Italian poet, lined thoroughly and warmly throughout with the substance of an English humorist."[32] Landor sees such borrowing a natural advantage, for it represents a union of the literature of the nations.

Landor's second statement seems to praise Chaucer's creating a language from Norman-French and Anglo-saxon and giving to the English a common language whose usage could be shared by the common man in the enjoyment of literature and in becoming acquainted with the concerns of the nation; he has actually addressed the common man in a language he could call his own. Landor thus makes a valid defence for Chaucer against those who consider his style coarse and comic, and also against Arnold's charge of a low style.

It is interesting too, that while some complain about the antiquity of Chaucer's language, Landor has praise even for Chaucer's spelling:

---

[31] Imaginary Conversations, Vol. IV, p. 274.

[32] "Short Notes on English Poets," the Fortnightly Review, 1880, pp. 708-710.

> It would be worth a scholar's while to trace the different spellings of the same words from Chaucer down to the present day. Many are spelt better by him than by any author since. He avoids the reduplication of vowels ea etc., and ends the word with e.[33]

He admires Chaucer's language just as he wrote it:

> . . . It may be doubted and must be whether the language in the Iliad and Odyssee was exactly as we find it now. . .
> The learned Pisistratus and his sons collected all they found. . . . Chaucer by the care of studious and learned men remains as we find him, even in spelling. This is worthy of notice and thankfulness. We find many words in his Canterbury Tales spelt better than we spell them now . . .
> [He] was the builder of our language . . . [34]

His comments on modernization of Chaucer are tinged with humour. Replying to a request from Richard Horne to participate in the modernization of Chaucer, he expressed his belief that "as many people read Chaucer" (in the original) "as were fit to read him." This, having been doubted by Horne, Landor wrote again:

> Indeed I do admire him, or rather love him. . . . I like even his language. I will have no hand in breaking his dun but rich-painted glass to put in (if clearer) much thinner panes.[35]

Later he is to modify his opinion and even defend Wordsworth for modernizing Chaucer. He does so on the ground that many cannot comprehend "that admirable poet's versification, in

---

[33] "Letter to A. de N. Walker," August, 1861, Letters and other Unpublished Writings of Walter Landor, ed., Stephen Wheeler, 1897, pp. 123, 177.

[34] An Unpublished prose fragment recorded by Spurgeon in Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, Vol. II, Part III, p. 57.

[35] "Letter to Richard Hengist Horne," Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning addressed to Richard Hengist Horne, ed. S. R. Townshend Mayer, 1877, Vol. i, p. 99.

which the nute e, as in French, is prolonged and sounded. He, however, does not rank Wordsworth with Chaucer: while he considers him a poet of high merit, he does not consider him one of the same kind or the same degree. Wordsworth, he says, "could no more have written the Canterbury Tales, nor any poetry so diversified, than he could have written Paradise Lost . . ."[36]

Arthur Hugh Clough, like Landor, comments favourably on Chaucer's importation of foreign elements into the language: "By the copious admission of Norman-French elements, [Chaucer] completed and transformed 'our homely meagre Semi-Saxon into a civilized speech.'[37] This, too, is counter to Swinburne's criticism; and though this may not be the most important part of the borrowing to which Swinburne refers, these elements were conducive to the greater French borrowing; for instance, from the Roman de la Rose which figures so prominently in Chaucer's work, as also his borrowings from Deschamps, Machaut, and Froissart.

Clough speaks also to the question of the final e which has been a source of misunderstanding of Chaucer's metrics. For Professor Child who has planned an edition of Chaucer, Clough has a message: "make the verses scan."

---

[36] On Orthography, "Letter to the Rev. Augustus Jessop," Fraser's Magazine, Feb. 1856, Vol. Liii, p. 244.

[37] Prose Remains of A. H. Clough, 1888, p. 342.

"People will not read Chaucer against their ears."[38]

In his Lecture on the Development of English Literature from Chaucer to Wordsworth, Clough commences by acknowledging Chaucer's paternity and seniority in English literature, but what seems even more important is his admission that Chaucer's portrayals are indeed true to English life even at this time (1852): Surviving unfaded in the lively colouring of the Canterbury Tales, he affirms, is the picture of all that pertains to those first exhibitions of English genius and temper: the monk as described in the General Prologue (ll. 173-178, 183-188), ladies paining themselves "to counterfeit cheer of court, and be estately of manere, and to be held worthy of reverence"; lawyers also as described by Chaucer (General Prologue, 371-372), the old and the young knight exhibiting quite the opposite behaviour, the discreet and steadfast merchant, "religious and laborious parish-clergymen, and church dignitaries, not very religious, and not at all laborious."[39]

Finally, some Victorians, while not expressing either dissatisfaction with, or admiration of, Chaucer, or making any mention of him whatsoever, yet have characters in which some resemblances to Chaucer's can be traced. John Masefield's Reynard the Fox, for example, has something Chaucerian about it. Walter Pater does not write about

---

[38]"Letter to Charles E. Norton," Dec. 9, 1853, Prose Remains of A. H. Cough, 1888, pp. 221-222.

[39]Prose Remains, pp. 334-336.

Chaucer and on one occasion even admits ignorance of the literature connected with Chaucer;[40] but he opens "The Child in the House" with an archetypal image: Florian meets by the wayside a poor aged man, and as he seems weary with the road, helps him on with the burden which he carries a certain distance. We should have no trouble recognizing this road, for all men are travelling along it. Chaucer's Theseus was among the first to give voice to the ancient image in the English tongue ("The Knight's Tale," 2847-2848). Although this pilgrim-of-life allegory and the technique of the dream-vision can be said to be derived from Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, there is some semblance of "The Pardoner's Tale" in Pater's illustration.

---

[40] It is said that when Pater and Richard Jackson visited an acquaintance Pater chanced to take up a rare little book called Chaucer Modernised. Admitting his ignorance of the master and his work, he added, "Of course I have heard of the Canterbury Tales, but I did not know that they were considered of sufficient importance to be modernised." With this admission Jackson offered to show him a work in his library which would "open his eyes." Arriving at Jackson's early one morning to have that promise fulfilled, he was given a copy of Speght's 1598 edition of Chaucer with which he occupied himself all day. From his experience with this work he conceived of a neglect of English in education and concluded:

> "Books like this or facsimiles of them ought to be in all schools and colleges." . . .

Then pointing to the portrait of Chaucer he continued:

> "This portrait, dight with heraldry, has as much within it as a vast number of the so-called commentaries of the Bible." (Thomas Wright, "Conversation with Mr. Richard C. Jackson," The Life of Walter Pater, 2 Vols., Vol. ii, pp. 267-268.)

Rudyard Kipling, too, seems to have based some of his characters on Chaucerian models. The Manchester Guardian in reviewing "The Wish House" suggests that in Mrs. Ashcroft, Kipling revises Chaucer's Wife of Bath, even to the 'mormal on her shinne.' But it is Chaucer's Cook, a man, who has the mormal. Kipling does not admit the supposed origin. In Something of Myself, he refers to the reviewer of "The Wish House" as having accused him (on grounds hard to discover) of borrowing from Chaucer's "Wife of Bath" even to the 'mormal on her shinne.' He is unaware of having done so, Kipling says, and leaves us in doubt whether he is sharing or humouring the mistake, since Mrs. Ashcroft, too, is a cook. Indeed, there is not much resemblance between Chaucer's 'Wife' and Mrs. Ashcroft except that "both had been mistresses in the 'olde daunce' of love and that both were mastered at length . . . by a younger man." Mrs. Ashcroft, too, could have said with the Wife,

> For certes, I am al Venerien
> In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.
> Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
> And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;
> ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue," 609-612)

But, unlike the Wife of Bath, Mrs. Ashcroft is a tragic figure; she lacks the Wife's exuberance, and one might admit Kipling's incapacity to appraoch Chaucer's masterly characterization.[41]

---

[41] In "The King's Ankus" Kipling turns from the frivolous to the serious, and in doing so imitates Chaucer's serious side. Taking a version of a well-known moral apologue, Chaucer's source for his "Pardoner's Tale," he com-

Kipling's interest in Chaucer is, however, shown in "Armageddon and After." He allows one of his characters--Castorley of "Dayspring Mishandled" who decides to devote himself to gentlemanly scholarship--to make himself an authority on Chaucer. Kipling wisely shows that amid all Castorley's vulgar pomposity, there is a genuine expertise and care for his subject; but he was blatant in seeking his own glorification. Manallace, another character in "Dayspring Mishandled" sets himself by attending Castorley's Chaucerian lectures to learn all about the composition of early printings of Chaucer and then spends a decade or more of his life in preparing a forgery of a new Chaucer fragment which finally makes Castorley a world figure in scholarship.[42] Manallace has thoughts of turning his Chaucerian verses into

---

bines a tale of hidden treasure and the following of a trail. The failure of Mowgli (the fosterling of wolves), to comprehend the value of the cumbrous jewelled ankus, for which men kill each other, serves the same purpose as the Pardoner's sermon.

The Canterbury Tales seems to have been one of Kipling's favourite works, judging from the number of times he turns to it for help in his own works. The Grand Trunk Road in the story of Kim owes more to The Canterbury Tales than to the didactic side of Kipling's loved Pilgrim's Progress because the didactic side of Kim is always played down. Again, the Wife of Bath is used as comparison: the Sahiba's entourage is equivalent to the Wife's world.

[42]Catorley's lectures are impressive in his detailed knowledge of such things as the idiosyncrasies of spelling and penmanship in Chaucer's copyists. Then it became known that 107 lines of a previously unknown Canterbury Tale have been discovered. The narrator calls on Castorley whom he finds made young again by joy and asks what the verses were about. "Oh, it was unquestionably Chaucer; 'the freshness, the fun, the humanity, the fragrance of it all, cries--no, shouts--itself as Dan's work'."

a comic opera--but it would be no use because Gilbert and Sullivan had command of the market. Yet in his elation over the discovery, Castorley exclaims that the verses, though handled as only Chaucer could, are 'as modern as Gilbert and Sullivan.' Kipling is reiterating the opinions of many of his age and before him that Chaucer's works are for all times.

Among other novelists, Thomas Hardy seems at times Chaucerian.[43] And it would appear very strange if Charles Dickens, who shared so much of Chaucer's motivation for writing, and wrote with humour at one moment and pathos the next, did not show admiration for, imitation of, or even just make some kind of reference to the earlier poet.[44] Referring to

---

[43]Hardy's men are extremely susceptible to the attraction of women, and therefore extremely aware of their fatality. But he no more turns his thumb on Elfride than Chaucer does on Criseyde. Progressively through her charm and the ineptitude of her comical concealment we are given a view of her helplessness and pathos, and in the end it is upon Knight that certain sufficiently grim words are spoken (J. M. Stewart, Thomas Hardy--A Critical Biography [London: Longman Group Limited, 1971, 1972), pp. 192, 207). This episode seems to hve something in common with Troilus and Criseyde.

Hardy seems also to have imitated Chaucer in some respects. A Superstitious Man's Story is linked together by a Chaucerian device: that of making the tellers fellow-travellers in a carrier's van (Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography [New York: Russell and Russell, 1970], p. 184). In A Group of Noble Dames (1889) Hardy would have us believe the stories are founded on fact and that they are related to events in the lives of the ancestors of Wessex people of quality (Preface, and letter to Edward Clodd, Rutland, p. 219). While he uses Boccaccio's device of stringing together a series of tales, he compares a lady to one of Chaucer's heroines--the Wife of Bath--who has 'all the craft of fine loving at her fingers' end' (A Group of Noble Dames, p. 185; Evelyn Hardy, Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography, p. 224).

[44]Despicable as oppressors of the poor were to him,

the immortalizing of Canterbury by Chaucer, and the Cathedral as a part of that immortality, Dickens juxtaposes imprisonment and want, marching side by side in the immediate neighbourhood of the Cathedral as illustrated by Mr. Micawber. Is this meant to be a commentary on the Church? Is it meant to show that Chaucer's intention in the Canterbury pilgrimage has been lost to Victorian England?

Other allusions to Chaucer include those of Edward Fitzgerald and George Meredith. Fitzgerald recommends "The Clerk's," "The Pardoner's," "The Knight's," and "The Squire's" tales to George Crabbe, admits that Chaucer is akin to Shakespeare in humour, sympathy, and activity of life, but thinks he has not sounded such depths of thought and feeling. And Meredith reminds us, as so many others have done, of the regenerative and national spirit of Chaucer's poetry:

---

it is not surprising that he sees in Chaucer's pardoner just what he felt Chaucer meant him to be, and expresses it: a humbug living on the credulity of the people. In The Old Curiosity Shop there is an echo of another of Chaucer's work --"The Prioress's Tale." The two decisive elements of the novel--the death of the child and the death of the Jew--must be related by the reader until he sees the one as in essence punishment for the other. Nor could Dickens resist modelling Chaucer's most delightful character, the 'Wife,' a parallel to Mrs. Gamp (in Martin Chuzzlewit). Like the 'Wife' Mrs. Gamp is willing to give us all the gossip of her personal life, exposing both her weakness and her strength. Like her gat-toothed counterpart she has triumphed over a harsh life without becoming hardened. They are both primarily social creatures radiating "extreme good humour and affability" (G. K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens [New York: Schocken Books, 1966], p. 160). That Dickens should portray this the liveliest of Chaucer's characters is not surprising. As Chesterton reminds us, of all the Victorians he seems to be the one that had most of Chaucer: the love of big jokes and long stories and brown ale; the love of the story within a story, every man telling a tale.

Gray with all honours of age! but fresh
featured and ruddy
As dawn when the drowsy farm-yard has thrice
heard Chaunticlere.
Tender to tearfulness--childlike and manly,
and motherly;
Here beats true English blood richest joyance
on sweet English ground.

The Victorians we meet in this Chapter, without exception, view Chaucer positively. Though the Pre-Raphaelites' forging of a resemblance of Chaucer with members of their group seems a bit far-fetched, their acknowledgement of the poet's work and worth is nonetheless sincere. Except for the problem of the final *e* there seems no hint of dissatisfaction with the poet's work: he is praised, he is imitated, he is adapted; there are resemblances in treatment of topics to others; he is on par with Homer; only Shakespeare, at times, rivals him for first place among the English poets.

# CHAPTER TWO

## ARNOLD'S VIEW OF CHAUCER

As high as Chaucer's Victorian reputation appears to be in the foregoing chapter, not all Victorians are in accord. Matthew Arnold for one, though he has great praise for many aspects of Chaucer's work, and makes favourable comments, has also two adverse criticisms regarding language and diction.

There is a general Victorian awareness of charges to be made against the poet and problems to be faced by Chaucer's readers. Mrs. Browning, Landor, and Clough refer to some of them by putting forth, against implied objection, their own positive views. Arnold, on the other hand will not allow imperfections, as he perceives them, to go unnoticed. He attacks both language and diction.[1] His first attack appears in "On Translating Homer," and "On Translating Homer: Last Words,"[2] both articles arising out of his dissatisfaction with an 1856 translation of Homer by Francis Newman (Cardinal

---

[1]Arnold does not differentiate clearly between language and diction, and at times seems to be using the two words interchangably. However, there is a clear distinction between the two in dealing with Chaucer; for instance, when Arnold speaks of modernizing Chaucer to make him current among Englishmen, he seems to be discussing language, but when he refers to Chaucer's inability to produce the "accent" of Dante, he is definitely speaking of diction.

[2]Lectures delivered at Oxford, 1861-2 Works 1903-4, 15 Vols., Vol. V, pp. 186, 22, 274, 276, 278-9.

Newman's brother), a translation Arnold considers unsuccessful.

In this work, Newman suggests that in order to give a suitable translation of Homer, a diction 'sufficiently antiquated to obtain pardon of the reader for its frequent homeliness' is required. This suggests to Arnold an attributing of antiqueness to Homer's language; he responds by denying that ascription and as a comparison suggests that the diction of Chaucer <u>is</u> antiquated. He questions whether Newman supposes that Homer's diction seemed antiquated to Sophocles, as Chaucer's seems to the nineteenth century. When it is suggested by one of Newman's readers that Homer's dialect and diction were probably as hard and obscure to a later Attic Greek as Chaucer's was to an Englishman of their own times, Arnold defends Homer to the detriment of Chaucer: in so far as Chaucer's language is antiquated for the particular purpose for which it is employed, i.e., for poetry, it is a bad representation of language. Homer's language, he says,

> was never antiquated for that particular purpose for which it was employed. . . . When Chaucer who uses such [antiquated] words, is to pass current amongst us, to be familiar to us, as Homer was familiar to the Athenians, he has to be modernised, as Wordsworth and others set to work to modernise him . . .
>
> Chaucer's words . . . are yet not thus an established possession of an Englishman's mind, and therefore they must not be used in rendering Homer into English.[3]

Not many critics would agree with Arnold's stand on modernization of Chaucer. Dryden's modernization was intended to

---

[3]Lectures delivered at Oxford, 1861-2 <u>Works</u>, Vol. V, pp. 274, 278-279.

increase readership for Chaucer's work; he suggested that if the first end of a writer is to be understood, then as his language grows obsolete, his thoughts must grow obscure.[4] But there are many who consider that modernization only detracts from the charm of Chaucer's work. Arnold himself suggests this when he compares Wordsworth's modernization of "The Prioress's Tale" with the original.[5] Of course, this comes at a time when he is praising Chaucer's virtue and not defending Homer's antiquity. Besides, the adverse comment is made in 1861-62, before he can have benefitted from modern Chaucer Scholarship which, although begun with Tyrwhitt's edition of The Canterbury Tales in 1775, came to fruition only with the founding of the Chaucer Society in 1868.

Arnold's second unfavourable criticism of Chaucer's poetry seems more serious and complicated than the former. Can this familiar denial that Chaucer's diction expresses

---

[4] "Preface to Fables Ancient and Modern" Of Dramatic Poesy and other Critical Essays (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1962), 2 Vols., Vol. ii, p. 288; Robert D. Hume, Dryden's Criticism (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970), p. 23.

[5] "My throte is kut unto my nekke boon,"
Seyde this child, "and, as by wey of kynde,
I sholde have dyed, ye, longe tyme agon.
But Jesu Crist, as ye in bookes fynde,
Wil that his glorie laste and be in mynde,
And for the worship of his Mooder deere
Yet may I synge O Alma loude and cleere."
(649-655)

"My throat is cut unto the bone, I trow,
Said this young child, and by the law of kind--
I should have died, yea, many hours ago."
(modernized version)

'high seriousness' be reconciled with the opinions of others; does it reflect Arnold's own critical theory and poetic practice?

Arnold's theory of poetry as expressed in "The Study of Poetry"[6] states that 'truth and seriousness' coupled with 'superiority of diction and movement' are requirements for the best poetry.[7] He admits that Chaucer has met one of these requirements--'poetic truth' in both substance and style--but lacks 'seriousness' which apparently is equivalent to the 'accent' of the great Classics.[8] The only clarification given for 'accent' is that one example is found in a line of Dante's <u>The Divine Comedy</u>:

"In la sua volontade é nostra pace. . . ."[9]

The quality of such a line presumably gives Dante his place

---

[6] <u>Essays in Criticism</u>, Second Series, ed. S. R. Littlewood (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), pp. 1-33.

[7] P. 13. The substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness. . . . The superior character of truth and seriousness in the matter and substance of the poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement.

[8] [Chaucer's poetry] transcends and effaces all the English poetry contemporary with it, it transcends and effaces all the English poetry subsequent to it down to the age of Elizabeth. Of such avail is poetic truth of substance, in its natural and necessary union with poetic truth of style. And yet, I say, Chaucer is not one of the great Classics. He has not their accent. . . . The accent of such verse as
"In la sua volontade é nostra pace. . . ."
is altogether beyond Chaucer's reach (<u>Essays in Criticism</u>, p. 19).

[9] "In His will is our peace" (<u>Paradiso</u>, iii, 85).

among the Classics; such quality is found in Homer, in Shakespeare, in Milton too, and even in the French Villon, whose poetry, according to Arnold, "has at its happy moments . . . more of this important virtue of seriousness than all the productions of Chaucer," although 'fitful' in Villon rather than sustained as in great poets.[10] It is an attainment, however, impossible to Chaucer.

Arnold has travelled a circuitous route in order to make his position clear, but one is still left with unanswered questions. What does he mean by 'seriousness' in poetry? What is the reason for Chaucer's lacking it?

If 'seriousness' is an ethical demand, then reasons come to mind. First, pre-Chaucerian poetry was often extremely moral, the poets often members of the clergy, its purpose dictated by the intellectual climate of the Church. Then, later English poets, from Sidney through the seventeenth century, frequently stressed the moral, didactic, and edifying aspects of poetry. Arnold himself seems to emphasize the edifying aspects. If, however, Arnold supposes that Chaucer lacks _moral_ seriousness, it may be that his judgment is not based on a full reading of the poet.

To be sure, he does have contact with _The Canterbury Tales_, but as to the number of tales he actually has read, that remains uncertain. There is ample evidence he read "The Prioress's Tale," as his quotation from it in praise of

---

[10] _Essays in Criticism_, p. 20.

Chaucer's virtue indicates: "virtue of manner and movement such as we shall not find in all the verse of romance-poetry. . . . such as we shall not find, perhaps, in all English poetry, outside of [Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Keats] whom I have named as the special inheritors of Chaucer's tradition." One line only from the Tale--

"O martyr souded in virginitee!"--

he considers sufficient to show the charm of Chaucer's verse. He proceeds to quote one stanza, which he compares with Wordsworth's modernization to show how much of Chaucer's charm is lost in the latter version.[11] There is evidence also that he has read the General Prologue and even agrees with Dryden's comment: "It is sufficient to say, . . . that here is God's plenty." And Ian Robinson tells us that Arnold knows also "The Knight's Tale" but cannot recognize in parts of the Tale a style of 'high seriousness' even in Arnold's sense of the phrase.[12] There is, however, no evidence that Arnold is acquainted with Chaucer's masterpiece and only finished work, Troilus and Criseyde, a copy of which is said to have been found in his library with the pages still uncut.[13] A reading of this might have altered his opinion. In the

---

[11]See note 5 above. Many feel, however, that no modernization of Chaucer, however masterly, could do him justice; the only real service from modernization is to encourage acquaintance with the original.

[12]Chaucer and the English Tradition (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1972), p. 146.

[13]Swinburne as Critic, ed. Clyde K. Hyder (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 64.

absence of evidence as to the extent of Arnold's reading of Chaucer, his statement regarding lack of 'seriousness' in Chaucer's poetry might be viewed as an unsupported personal estimate; and, according to Arnold, a personal estimate is a fallacy.[14] Arnold's position, then, seems to be that Chaucer's poetry lacks moral weight, therefore it lacks 'high seriousness.' If Chaucer's work is read piecemeal, there are in places, certain aspects of matter and expression that might not appear edifying to Arnold; for instance, parts of "The Miller's" and "The Merchant's" tales. But if Chaucer's portrayals are a part of life, they constitute truth; an unanswered question, then, is whether Arnold considers truth itself moral and serious.[15]

---

[14]Essays in Criticism, p. 5.

[15]Furthermore, in the light of changes that occur in the language (sometimes elevating, sometimes debasing works down to Arnold's day), changes in society's tastes and standards, and--most important--Chaucer's own estimate of the purpose of his work, the so-called "bawdy" tales which could influence Arnold's opinion, might not have been considered merely "bawdy" by Chaucer's audience, and perhaps should not be considered so by us. If we agree with Arnold that "literature is a criticism of life," it follows that all of life should be included--the noble aspects as well as the ignoble. Characters like Januarie, May and Damian of "The Merchant's Tale," Nicholas and Alisoun of "The Miller's," as well as the Wife of Bath with her stunning revelations, are apparently true to medieval life. Their prototype might have been common to Chaucer as he toured the country-side performing his duty as a public official. They are around us even today and we cannot wish them away. It is this universality that adds to the life of Chaucer's poetry so that six centuries later it is still meaningful. As Dryden writes,

> We have our forefathers and great-grand-dames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's days: their general characters are still remaining in mankind, and even in England, though they are called by other

Still, according to Arnold, it is not only in matter --true or not--that Chaucer's poetry falls short of 'high seriousness.' Wherein then lies this other lack? in language? style? purpose? Arnold's first great claim for the moral reality and value of poetry is that it deals with a subject that is either explicitly moral (the inner life of man and the laws of Nature), or implicitly moral (the life of Nature). His second claim is that, whatever the subject, poetry is moral in the manner of its contact with the subject. He appears to be saying that poetry is valuable because it is in some way both dignified and true. But he judges the truth of poetry as he judges the truth of Christianity by its word effects,[16] its power to stabilize men

---

names than those of Monks, and Friars, and Canons, and Lady Abesses, and Nuns; for mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of nature, though everything is altered ("Preface to Fables" Of Dramatic Poesy, Vol. II, pp. 284-285).

The tales have an aura of truth to life: they are Chaucer's presentation and criticism of life, just what Arnold says literature should be. As Samuel Johnson earlier argued, art must mirror life.

Besides, if the Canterbury pilgrimage is taken to be, as many believe, the depiction of life, a pilgrimage from this world to the next, Chaucer may be reminding us of the diversity of the crowd. It is similar to Langland's 'field of folk'--all classes and condition of men, all imperfect, seeking a perfection not to be attained until the end of the pilgrimage. Thus Johnson's idea that art in mirroring life must instruct, seems valid here. Chaucer himself in writing was seeking to perfect his poetic craft and needed the full range of his view of life to do so.

[16]In Arnold's examples of lines and expressions of great masters--the great Classics--from which Chaucer is excluded, word effects seem indeed his measure:

From Dante:

and fit them for a moral action in the world. This is the main point in his 1833 Preface to Poems. It is a subjective view, says Vincent Buckley; his grasp of poetry is in terms of moral effectiveness, his grasp of moral effectiveness is in terms of sentiment and the power of sentiment to ennoble or console.[17]

In his essay on Wordsworth, Arnold supports his definition of poetic genius as 'the noble and profound application of ideas to life' by noting that Voltaire, a critic of signal acuteness, has attributed the greatness of English poetry to the fact that it treats moral ideas more energeti-

---

> Io son fatta da Dio, sau mercè, tale,
> Che la vostra miseria non mi tange,
> Ne fiamma d'esto incendio non m'assale . . .
> [Of such sort hath God, thanked be His mercy,
> made me, that your misery toucheth me not,
> neither doth the flame of this fire strike me[
> (Inferno, ii, 91-93)

> In la sua volontade è nostra pace.
> [In His will is our peace]
> (Paradiso, iii, 85)

From Shakespeare:

> If thou didst ever hold me in they heart,
> Absent thee from felicity awhile,
> And in this harsh world draw they breath in pain
> To tell my story . . .
> (Hamlet, V, ii, 357-360)

From Milton:

> Darken'd so, yet shone
> Above them all the archangel; but his face
> Deep scars of thunder had intrench'd, and care
> Sat on his faded cheek . . .
> (Paradise Lost, Bk. I, 599-602)

[17] Poetry and Morality (London: Chatto and Windus, 1968), p. 53.

cally and profoundly than the poetry of any other nation. He points out that Voltaire did not mean by treatment of moral ideas in poetry, 'the composing moral and didactic poems,' for these belong to a 'lower kind' than even ballad poetry. The expression moral idea, Arnold argues, includes everything which attempts to answer the question 'how to live' and he gives examples from Milton, Keats, and Shakespeare.[18]

Arnold perhaps is also following the tendency of Victorian poetics from the 1840's to the 1880's to assume that good poetry has the power to influence conduct. The idea of the moral influence of poetic style appears in his early thoughts on the purpose of poetry. In a letter to Clough in 1849, he comments on 'the grand and moral effects produced by [Sophocles'] style' on us, which he says is more important than what Sophocles teaches about psychology and emotion.[19] In 1853 he reminds Clough that what men want from

---

[18]Nor love thy life, nor hate; but, what thou liv'st,
Live well; how long or short, permit to heaven.
(Paradise Lost, Bk. XI, ll. 553-554)

Forever wilt thou love, and she be fair--
(Keats's words to the lover on the Grecian Urn)

We are such stuff
As dreams are made of, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep
(The Tempest, IV, i, 156-158)

All these express moral ideas for Arnold.

[19]The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough, ed. Howard Foster Lowry (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), p. 101.

poetry is something to animate and ennoble them.[20] This, he says, is the basis of his poetics.[21]

Chaucer's manner in dealing with his subject seems to differ from Arnold's idea. He does not tell how to live; his is not a reforming motive, but one of revelation; he simply tells how life is being lived, naturally. This involves the treatment of his topic--love--realistically. Often, there is no attempt to clothe it in sophisticated language or render it more pleasing to the audience. What seems more important, however, is that the expression of the different aspects of love hinges on his poetic skill, or is a part of his art which he wants to perfect. One can see reasons for Arnold's revulsion; for in order that the work may reflect these various aspects of love, Chaucer has not only to show love as an emotion that exists in human beings, but also to portray the human passions that accompany it. If the work must be plausible as a criticism of life, then it must include all aspects of life, all classes of mankind, and must be rendered in a language appropriate to each class; thus he must present not only the courtly relation of Troilus and Criseyde, of Averagus and Dorigen, of Arcite, Palamon, and Emilie, the ideal relationship portrayed in *The Book of the Duchess*, but also the matters of the fabliaux, with accompanying undignified language, in "The Miller's," "The Reeve's," and "The

---

[20] *The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough*, p. 146.

[21] *Ibid*.

Merchant's" tales. For the first time, the common reader is addressed, and this, says Ian Robinson, is one way in which Chaucer merits the appellation "Father of English Literature."[22] On the surface, he does not seem to subscribe to Arnold's idea that "the noble and profound application of ideas to life is the most essential part of poetic greatness"; but perhaps he subscribes in his way to the ideas that "Beauty is truth," and that "Truth is beauty"; what seems immoral and ugly for Arnold is "Beauty" for Chaucer, in that it is "Truth" to life--even "low life."

In "The Study of Poetry" Arnold tries to show that really good poetry arises from the union of a style whose diction and movement are in the grand manner, and a matter and substance which have high truth and seriousness. The powerful application of ideas to life, he argues, is not an effective criticism of life unless it is made "under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty."[23] Ideally there exists, he says, an inseparable connection between manner and matter, language and thought, style and idea, although in practice it is impossible to point out the failings of a poet in terms of his ability to fullfil one or the other requirement for an effective criticism of life.

---

[22] Chaucer and the English Tradition, p. 285.

[23] Essays in Criticism, p. 3.

> The superior character of truth and seriousness in the matter and substance of the best poetry is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner. The two superiorities are closely related and are in steadfast proportion one to the other. So far as high poetic truth and seriousness are wanting to a poet's matter and substance, so far also, we may be sure, will a high poetic stamp of diction and movement be wanting to his style and manner. In proportion as this high stamp of diction and movement, again, is absent from a poet's style and manner, we shall find, also, that high poetic truth and seriousness are absent from his substance and matter.[24]

We might now deduce that Arnold believes "this high stamp of diction" is absent from Chaucer's style and thus "seriousness" is absent also.[25]

Arnold clearly believes that poetry's moral power is constituted by style as well as by ideas; one is not without the other. Chaucer and Burns, who exhibit a powerful application of ideas to life, still in Arnold's view fall short of greatness because they do not achieve a powerful "poetic"

---

[24]Essays in Criticism, p. 13.

[25]As important as diction is, Chaucer ranks his matter equally or even more important. We note that he departed from the dream-vision tradition, not because he was outgrowing the influence of the convention, but because it could no longer accommodate all of his ideas; nor could they be superimposed on the tradition. One notes the conflict when, in The Parlement of Foules, Chaucer attempts to combine experience, tradition, and perception. For similar reasons, Chaucer must abandon at times certain aspects of the rhetorical tradition. As poetry is "a spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," Chaucer could not be bound by the strict rules of rhetoric. Besides, he was experimenting in order to perfect a method which would bring together his subject and his craft. His concern with diction was to the extent that he communicate effectively with his audience; for that reason it must be that of the audience he addresses to facilitate comprehension; as Dryden indicates later, "The author must try to communicate with his audience. His is the communicative not the expressive function of literature."

application of ideas to life. Chaucer's style, which is a simple one, flexible and adaptable to the variety of ideas that must be appropriately expressed, free of rhetorical ornament, does not meet Arnold's approval.[26]

---

[26]But Chaucer in choosing this simple style, in his avoidance of "whatever smacks of the high flown, the grandiloquent or the pompous" has his audience in mind. It is his medium of "poetic application of ideas to life." As public official travelling around the country, he must have had experience of common folk who were unable to understand high speech. Chaucer made provision for them in his tales: the Host calls on the Clerk to tell "some merry thing" and requests him to tell it in plain terms so that "we may understand what ye say." The Squire cannot describe the beauty of Canace, because he lacks the necessary command of style and is no rhetorician:

> But for to telle yow al hir beautee,
> It lyth nat in my tonge, n'yn my konnyng;
> I dar nat undetake so heigh a thyng.
> Myn Englissh eek is insufficient.
> It moste been a rethor excellent,
> That koude his colours longynge for that art,
> If he sholde hire discryven every part.
> I am noon swich, I moot speke as I kan
> (34-41)

The Franklin, a plain man, can and will speak only as a plain man. He has never learned rhetoric, nor slept on Mt. Parnassus or studied Cicero.

> Colours of rethoryk been to me queynte;
> My spirit feeleth noght of swich mateere.
> (The Prologe of the Frankeleyns Tale)

and Chaucer will not write as men do when they write to kings:

> Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyn.

This is not to deny Chaucer's capacity for dignified or exalted language when the occasion warrants it. The Dream-poems which were presumably written for a select audience, a courtly one, seems to engage in more sophisticated speech. As early as The Book of the Duchess (in the Black Knight's lamentation), The House of Fame (in the scientific explanation of the operation of sound), and also in the later "Knight's Tale" of The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer has shown the ability for sophisticated thoughts and language; and might even be included in the lesser of Arnold's two grand

Yet Arnold seems inconsistent in his opinions on Chaucer. This inconsistency is exemplified in the very favourable statements he has made regarding the poet: Chaucer "will be read, as time goes on, far more generally than he is read now," he says in 1880. The enthusiasm for Chaucer scholarship down to our time confirms his statement. Again, Arnold views the substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life as having "largeness, freedom, shrewdness, benignty"; "he is a genuine source of joy and strength, which is flowing still for us and will flow always"; "he is a perpetual fountain of good sense"; "his power of fascination . . . is enduring"; his kindly view of life gives his poetry "truth of substance." His statement that there is no higher and no more serious problem than how to make men happy is an indirect commendation, for Chaucer is among the few English poets who attempt and succeed in bringing happiness to their audience. The superficial reason for the tales on the Canterbury road is to keep the pilgrims happy and to while away the time; The Book of the Duchess, in addition to its eulogizing function, is to soothe John of Gaunt's grieving spirit; The Legend of Good Women to do the same for women whose spirits may have been ruffled by Chaucer's apparent unfavourable portrait of Criseyde. In other words, all is designed for happiness, for effect on the the audience, so that even today we read about Pandarus' and

---

styles: the "grand style simple" as exemplified by Homer, as opposed to the "grand style severe" exemplified by Milton.

the eagle's wiles, the actions of the love-sick Troilus, the cunning of the Pardoner and the Friar with laughter and amusement before pondering the serious aspect.

Not only is Arnold's adverse critical view of Chaucer in conflict with some of his own statements, it is also at variance with those of other critics of his time. Ruskin for example, considers Chaucer a teacher of pure theological truth; one among the prophets of God; his words as testimonies of the Lord.[27] It appears that Arnold's moral stance is his single motivation for his primary adverse criticism of Chaucer.[28]

---

[27] The Works of John Ruskin, ed. E. L. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (New York and London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903-1912), Vol. XXIX, p. 56. Cf. Dryden's statement that Chaucer matches Homer and Virgil "where they most excel":

> Of love sung better, and of armes as well--

a reference it seems to "The Knight's Tale" and to Troilus and Criseyde; and Pater in his praise of "The Knight's Tale" as a noble and powerful handling of the theme of friendship describes it as "especially a classical motive."

[28] He might have been guided by his own advice that a personal estimate is a fallacy, as well as by that of his contemporary, Ruskin, whose view on one's personal opinions on writers seems generally to have been in accord with Arnold's. Ruskin, again, writes,

> [We should] divest ourselves entirely of that weakness of mind which disposes us to yield to our wishes rather than to our reason, to believe in the existence of that which we desire to exist, in the validity of the arguments which we desire to be valid, and in the fallacy of the statements which we hope may be false. For our feelings naturally incline us to hope that we may be able to prove that writings from which we have derived incalculable enjoyment are injurious and immoral, and our wishes rise up in opposition to our judgment; they remonstrate against the investigation, they deprecate the

Arnold's critical opinions on Chaucer are mixed then. This may be due first, to limited reading and therefore limited knowledge of the poet's work; secondly, to his demand that great poetry speaks in heightened and soul-stirring language. But the very fact that he has made so many other positive statements on Chaucer leads one to question his apparent bias, especially in his reference to Chaucer's antiquated language where he shows a double standard in his judgment of Chaucer and Homer on the same matter.[29] His view on diction is given in a more sober tone, leading from the virtues and culminating in the fault,[30] and therefore more tolerable.

Chaucer perhaps would have acquiesced with these views of Arnold as he notes in the _Troilus_ that his readers

---

> decision, they beseech, they implore that employments so delightful may not be condemned for the past nor forbidden for the future; and that hours whose wings were loaded with odours so soft, and tinted with colours so gay, may not be pronounced to have left darkness in the eyes they have dazzled, or pestilence in the air they have enchanted.
>
> But it is necessary that such feelings should have no voice in our inquiry after truth, and that our wishes, as they have no influence over facts should have none over our opinions ("Essay on Literature" _The Works of John Ruskin_, Vol. I, pp. 357-358. Cf. Arnold's "The Study of Poetry" _Essays in Criticism_).

[29] See p. 38 above.

Another bias in favour of Homer is seen in the following passage:

> German schools have the good habit of reading and commenting on German poetry, as we read and comment on Homer and Virgil, but do _not_ read and comment on Chaucer and Shakespeare.
> (_The Works of John Ruskin_, Vol. V, p. 79).

[30] "The Study of Poetry" _Essays in Criticism_, pp. 16-20.

are under obligation to correct him at their discretion.[31] Still Arnold seems to have left us with little valid, clear, consistent reason for denying Chaucer the highest rank among poets.

---

[31]For myne wordes, heere and every part,
I speke hem alle under correccioun
Of yow that felyng han in loves art,
And putte it al in youre discrecioun
To encresse or maken dymynucioun
Of my langage, and that I yow biseche.
(Bk. III, 1331-1336)

# CHAPTER THREE

## MORRIS'S USE OF CHAUCER

Morris's fascination with the Middle Ages and the idea of medieval life should be considered before embarking on an investigation of how he uses the greatest medieval poet as his literary model. This fascination, exemplified in all facets of his work, began very early in his life, when some of the most celebrated Victorian writers, Carlyle and Ruskin, as well as Tennyson in poetry and Pugin in architecture, were enthusiastically following a tendency that had begun in the eighteenth century.

Morris was only nine years old when Thomas Carlyle's Past and Present appeared with its attack on the mediocrity and sterility in society (considered offshoots of industrialism and democracy), the solution for which could be found by a return to the values of thirteenth-century monasticism, as expressed in the disciplined life of Samson, Abbot in Bury St. Edmunds. Carlyle wished to see a government strong enough to put an end to social injustice as well as social disorders. This concept was to become important to Morris later in his search for a cure of injustice in his socialist dreams and activities, and his picture of an ideal society.

Morris has often been charged with having an uncritical admiration for the medieval period, and of having a

single desire to return to medieval conditions. Indeed, he has studied those conditions extensively, found much to admire, and is convinced that Capitalism of the nineteenth century has destroyed much of the joys of life. He is not advocating a return to the past, however. His fight for Socialism is an attempt to regain the joy that man has lost from his work through the introduction of machines into the society.[1] As a disciple of Ruskin, he has begun a revival of handicrafts, and promoted an appreciation for the fine quality and variety of design of handmade goods by protesting against the sameness of machine-made furnishings. This is in part a return to the Middle Ages with its delight in handmade tapestry, but is even more an attack on Capitalism which, he thinks, uses machines to intensify exploitation of the working population.

As a student at Oxford, he soon showed his love for the medieval past in his choice of subjects. He chose Medieval History above the Classics. With Edward Burne-Jones whom he met there, he embarked on a study of Medieval Art, and even expounded to Jones the treasures of Oxford's

---

[1]Machines not only replaced many workers, but also robbed them of the closer association they would have had with their master; while the noise of the machines and the smoke and soot produced, made it impossible for them to have any pleasure in their work. Morris was not alone in his fight against mechanization of Life. Ruskin expresses his and others' disgust though in a more subdued way: "Shakespeare and Chaucer--Dante and Virgil-- . . . all the men of any age or country who seem to have had Heaven's music on their lips, agree in their scorn of mechanic life" (<u>The Works of John Ruskin</u>, Vol. XVII, p. 402).

Medieval Architecture, and the illuminated manuscripts of the Bodleian. Together they worked on aspects of Medievalism--an intense study of theology and Church History, and Latin Verse of the Middle Ages. This interest was reinforced by contact with medieval art, architecture, and poetry of Belgium and Northern France on his vacation there in 1854 and 1855. The latter visit instilled in him an admiration for Gothic architecture. Inspired by these contacts, Morris and Jones (both of whom had had plans for the Church) decided that religion could as well be served by art as by studies in theology; thus he embarked on a career of Art and Architecture "not as a means of gaining a livelihood but as a means of realizing life."

Although this decision concerning both aspects of art confirms Morris's obsession with the Middle Ages, it is with literary art that this chapter is concerned, particularly with Morris's apparent use of Chaucer as a model for his literary exercises. Similarities with Chaucer's work will be examined, as well as differing aspects, and the opinions of critics of Morris's own day as to Chaucer's influence on Morris, will be weighed. It will consider also how Morris's assessment of Chaucer changes, going from antiquarian interest to something deeper. Space will also be given in this chapter to the explication of some of Morris's most beautiful passages in which he pays tribute to his Master Chaucer and to Chaucer's London, and in which there is some craving for the immortality that Chaucer enjoys.

It was in 1855, then, at Oxford, that Morris with his friend Burne-Jones, first discovered Chaucer, whom he afterwards took for his special master. At first, he was attracted more to Chaucer's entertaining humour than his social realism.[2] He comes to find in the poet "not merely the wider and sweeter view of life which was needed to correct the harsh or mystical elements of his own medievalism, but the conquest of English verse as a medium boundless in its range and perfect in its flexibility." Morris has already produced some poetry, and is engaged in writing prose romances. But in Chaucer he has found something worthy of emulation: a verse form that is flexible and wide-ranging. As Chaucer earlier abandoned one technique because of its inadequacy to express his multitudinous and wide range of ideas, Morris is to abandon prose for thirty years in favour of poetry which he now considers the single form of his production in literature.[3] He can now develop a narrative technique which he had first used successfully in his Marlborough school-days, and the lyrical prose qualities he demonstrated in the _Oxford and Cambridge Magazine_. This combination already there is perhaps reinforced by Chaucer's model.

The plan of _The Canterbury Tales_ seems to suggest to him a model for a set of romantic stories that can be unified

---

[2]Paul Thompson, _The Work of William Morris_ (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), p. 147.

[3]J. W. Mackail, _The Life of William Morris_ (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1968), Vol. I, p. 61.

by a social vision. Like Chaucer, and in consonance with the rhetorical tradition, Morris turns to 'olde bokes,' classical and romantic sources, while retaining Chaucer's style and manner. Moreover, he medievalizes Greek stories by setting the scenes in Chaucer's own time--the end of the fourteenth century--and by having the narrators speak in the voice of Western Europeans. These inventions strip the tales of their Classical and Grecian qualities, yet are they not modernized as in Tennyson's 'Oenone' or 'Tiresias,' or Arnold's 'Empedocles,' or Swinburne's 'Atalanta in Calydon.'[4] The result is The Earthly Paradise (1868-70), Morris's closest likeness to Chaucer's work. The Life and Death of Jason (1867) apparently intended to be a part of the former, is broken off and published separately at an earlier date. In both poems the influence of Chaucer may be detected.

Morris is reported to have denied his use of Chaucer as a model in his reply to a German student who questioned the resemblance of both poets' works;[5] but Morris's work, The Life and Death of Jason and The Earthly Paradise in particular, has so much in common with The Canterbury Tales[6] that it is difficult to accept Morris's claim of a resemblance due only to the use of the narrative method by both.

---

[4]J. W. Mackail, The Life of William Morris, Vol. I, p. 180.

[5]Ibid., p. 197.

[6]Parts of The Earthly Paradise also have resemblances to The Book of the Duchess and The Legend of Good Women. See pp. 72-73 below.

There are resemblances also in structure, in metre, in manner of portrayal. The arrangement of Apology similar to that in the General Prologue of The Canterbury Tales, followed by a series of stories each with its own prologue and epilogue, the whole ending with an Envoi in The Earthly Paradise in place of The Canterbury Tales' Retraction, is by no means coincidental; nor can Morris's use of the heroic couplet, the octosyllabic couplet, and rhyme royal as used by Chaucer in a similar setting, be considered accidental. The frame setting, the narrative technique, the narrator, the dreamer, all seem to indicate imitation, if not clear discipleship. His gathering of materials from 'olde bokes,' classical and romantic sources, seems also to parallel Chaucer's manner in his early period. Of course, Morris has not that diversity which Chaucer commanded through his inimitable range of social types and literary genres, but he is able to invent his own methods of variation; for by this time he is becoming an expert craftsman, as Chaucer was when he created The Canterbury Tales.

A close reading of the two works will reveal even deeper similarities. Chaucer's straightforward timely narration and detailed description is seen not only in The Earthly Paradise but also in The Life and Death of Jason.[7] So great a likeness to the greatest narrative poet exists

[7]The same cannot be said of his earlier work, The Defence of Quenevere, which was criticized for its complexity and obscurity.

that Morris has been perceived by many as the "modern Chaucer" or the "Victorian Chaucer." He has also been tagged the best narrative poet since Chaucer in half of the predominantly favourable articles written about him in literary journals after the publication of the above mentioned works;[8] and Swinburne even equates him with Chaucer in narrative power.[9] One aspect of this narrative quality that has received much praise from Victorian critics like Arnold and Swinburne is its lucidity. Of this quality in Morris, Annie MacDonell remarks that it is the crowning quality of his work, that for which "for a narrator there is no better" (Bookman, September, 1896), while the Spectator critique of September 12, 1896 notes that he does not "hide a lack of thought under enigmatic language."[10] This clear narrative style is indeed a relief from the obscurity of much contemporary poets as the "Spasmodics" (like the early Browning, for instance, under whose influence he seems to have been when he wrote The Defence of Quenevere), and might just result from the influence of Chaucer, whom he discovered in 1855.[11] Others note that his use of concrete details to

---

[8]Delbert Gardner, An "Idle Singer" And His Audience (The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1975), p. 38).

[9]See pp. 82-83 below.

[10]On this aspect of Chaucer, Ruskin thinks otherwise: Chaucer, like Homer, the Greek Tragedians, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, has been enigmatic (See p. 107 below).

[11]The Defence of Quenevere was published in 1858 and The Life and Death of Jason and The Earthly Paradise nine and

render events in the story vivid and credible is an especially "felicitous result of Chaucerian influence." This is supported by a statement of the Saturday Review of May 30, 1868 that both the classical and the medieval tales in The Earthly Paradise have that portrayal of life in detail which was an express feature of the gestour's art, and which Chaucer imaged truly.

Together with this use of concrete details goes Morris's concern with natural description. Much of the detail in The Life and Death of Jason and The Earthly Paradise testify to this. In "The Man Born to be King" Michael is riding uphill when

> He saw before him like a wall
> Uncounted tree-trunks dim and tall.
> (The Earthly Paradise, Vol. III, p. 133)

In "The Story of Cupid and Psyche" Psyche awakes after having been transported by the wind to Cupid's valley:

> And all about were dotted leafy trees,
> The elm for shade, the linden for the bees,
> The noble oak, long ready for the steel
> Which in that place it had no fear to feel;
> The pomegranate, the apple, and the pear
> That fruit and flowers at once made shift to bear,
> Nor yet decayed therefor; and in them hung
> Bright birds that elsewhere sing not, but here sung
> As sweetly as the small brown nightingales
> Within the wooded, deep Laconian vales.
> (The Earthly Paradise, Vol. IV, p. 17)

Compare this with the same kind of pictorial quality, cataloguing of details in nature found in Chaucer. In The Parlement of Foules, when "Affrycan" in a dream seized Chaucer and

---

ten years later after Morris had had much time to absorb Chaucer.

'shof [him] in at the gates wide' of the garden, Chaucer saw

> trees clad with leaves that aye shal laste,
> Ech in his kynde, of colour fresh and greene
> As emeraude, that joye was to seene.
>
> The byldere ok, and ek the hardy asshe;
> The piler elm, the cofre unto carayne;
> The boxtre pipere, holm to whippes lashe;
> The saylynge fyr; the cipresse, deth to playne;
> The sheltere ew; the asp for shaftes pleyne;
> The olyve of pes, and eke the drinke vyne;
> The victor palm, the laurer to devyne (173-182)

The description of the garden and the animals is no less vivid. One agrees then, that as story-tellers and descriptive artists, Morris has something in common with Chaucer.

But there are important areas in which the two poets seem to differ; for instance, in character portrayal and in tone. Morris's characters lack the flesh-and-blood reality of Chaucer's Pardoner, Summoner, and Friar for instance, the exuberant animation of the Wife of Bath, the vivid qualities of Palamon and Arcite. Reasons for the apparent weakness of Morris's characters may be found in what he states as the aim of his work: to provide his readers with restful entertainment by having them listen to an "idle singer of an empty day."[12] Morris's disillusionment with social conditions is expressed in this phrase: "empty day" apparently referring to his own era--the nineteenth century in England when "time [seems] out of joint," and he, an "idle singer" because there seems not much more he can do about prevailing conditions but write about them, making comparison with earlier periods, and

---

[12]The Apology to The Earthly Paradise.

himself with earlier writers; as he says, he has been "born out of [his] due time."

> Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
> Let it suffice me that my murmuring rhyme
> Beats with light wing against the ivory gate,
> Telling a tale not too importunate
> To those who in the sleepy region stay,
> Lulled by the singer of an empty day (23-28)
>
> So let me sing of names remembered,
> Because they, living not, can ne'er be dead,
> Or long time take their memory quite away
> From us poor singers of an empty day (18-21)[13]

This very helplessness of his does not contribute to life-like characters such as Chaucer's, and with the atmosphere of doom that surrounds a search for "an earthly paradise," one that does not realistically exist, the weak delineation of characters is not surprising.

On the other hand, Chaucer in the General Prologue gives a picture of a pilgrimage (to Canterbury) which the pilgrims undertake not for the saving of their lives, as do Morris's pilgrims, but for the salvation of their souls. Evidently, it takes on the symbolic meaning of life's journey destined for an "unearthly paradise" which can actually be attained at the end of the journey. From the various portraits of the pilgrims, we are immediately brought into an atmosphere of fun, yet of sobriety, and expectancy. Indeed,

---

[13]How different is this to Chaucer's creation. He, too, had no cure for the ills of society, but he could point the way to regeneration by travelling with sinners to a holy shrine (a symbolic gesture), a preparation for the "heavenly paradise"; and while doing this, creates an awareness of the problems of the day through stories. He was no "idle singer of an empty day."

some of the tales like "The Clerk's," "The Man of Lawe's," "The Parson's," are moralistic and intended as instruction to aid in the attainment of the goal sought; others like "The Pardoner's," "The Friar's," "The Summoner's" with their portrayal of hypocrisy, avarice, mammonism, illustrate evils that will hinder the attainment of the desired end and thus to be avoided; but some like "The Shipman's," "The Miller's," "The Reeve's," "The Merchant's" and "The Wife of Bath's" were probably told for entertainment along the way, or as a part of the reality of life.

The purpose of the journeys being different, Morris's portrayal lacks the optimistic Christian anticipation of a paradise to be attained at the end of the journey as Chaucer's indicate, as also the living of life to the hilt while preparing for the one beyond. He projects, instead, an atmosphere of doom, of swift-coming death. In accord with the apprehensiveness surrounding the scepticism of the pilgrimage is the fatalistic tone which detracts from the structural craft of his two Chaucerian poems, though to a lesser extent in _The Life and Death of Jason_. The poems lack the perspective of Chaucer's poem, which holds out a promise of another and happier life after death. As an inheritor of many of Chaucer's qualities, some critics of his day wondered at his melancholy, so different from the tone of Chaucer. "Not a charming scene is visited, or an hour of perfect delight passed . . . without the intruding reflection that death ends it all and it comes speedily," the _New Monthly_

Magazine (September 1871) asserts. This tone of the ominous knell of death is rather one associated with the Middle Ages when everyone was obsessed with the fears of 'mutabilite' and 'contemptu munde,' and should be adapted more by Chaucer than by Morris. But these two works of Morris prove the opposite true.

This is not to say that there are no sombre moments in Chaucer. In "The Knight's Tale" Arcite complains:

> "What is this world? what asketh men to have?
> Now with his love, now in his colde grave
> Allone, withouten any compaigne" (2777-79)

Theseus in his lofty speech at the end of the same story reminds us that all things must pass away; the oak, the stone, the river, towns; but also

> Of man and womman seen we wel also
> That nedes, in oon of thise termes two,
> This is to seyn, in youthe or elles age,[14]
> He moot be deed, the king a shal a page,
> Som in his bed, som in the depe see,
> Som in the large feeld, as men may see;
> Ther helpeth noght, al goth that ilke weye
> (3027-3033)

But Chaucer's mixture of the comic, drama, and lively characters does not allow us to indulge in fatalistic dreams and anticipated doom. He never allows us to forget the purpose of the pilgrimage, and that life in all its aspects must continue until the end of the journey. This latter is exemplified also in Troilus and Criseyde. To be sure, death and an after-life figure in the story, but on their journey of life,

---

[14]Marquis Walter voices similar sentiments in "The Clerk's Tale."

Troilus and Criseyde have experienced life fully: joy and sorrow experienced and spoken; then for Troilus, death and the blessed Paradise and a renunciation of what of "paradise" there is on earth.[15] The same is true of the Canterbury pilgrimage: what of sombre mood intrudes on the plan was only a realistic part of all the other activities that comprise the whole.

On Morris, by way of contrast, the Edinburgh Review (January, 1871) sums it up well when it suggests "that 'the idle singer of any empty day' . . . has given us melodies of exquisite sweetness, it would be mere ingratitude to deny; but the music of this earthly paradise is mournful because it is so earthly. . . . the language of the poet throughout is not only that of resignation to a doom of absolute extinction after a short sojourn here, but of the philosophy which makes this extinction the one justification of the moment." The attitude of "eat, drink, and be merry for to-morrow we die," without hope of any after-life, seems to have been an obsession with Morris at this time. The Christian overtone so prominent in Chaucer is completely absent here. It is this absence even more than his reminder of "quick-coming death" that bothers the reviewers, notes Gardner,[16] and the Spectator of November 5, 1898 concurs:

---

[15]Arcite's struggles to gain Emilie, and his submitting her to his cousin Palamon at the point of death compares to Troilus' renunciation of "earthly paradise."

[16]Delbert Gardner, An "Idle Singer" And His Audience, p. 53.

> It is not the frequent allusions to death amidst the loveliest scenes in The Earthly Paradise that lessen their charm, but the belief so often expressed or implied that there is no sure hope of anything beyond death.

Twenty years after the publication of The Earthly Paradise Morris is to express a different view. Having seemingly overcome much of his pessimism he tries to rally the people of England to look to the future.[17] Pointing to the spirit Chaucer exudes generally in his poetry, and in The Canterbury Tales in particular, he writes:

> A kindly and human muse is Chaucer's, nevertheless, interested in and amused by all life, but of her very nature devoid of strong aspirations for the future; and that all the more, since though the strong devotion and fierce piety of the ruder Middle Ages had by this time waned, and the Church was more often lightly mocked at than either feared or loved, still the habit of looking on this life as part of another yet remained: the world is fair and full of adventure; kind men and true and noble are in it to make one happy; fools also to laugh at, and rascals to be resisted yet not wholly condemned; and when this world is over we shall go on living in another which is a part of this. Of this picture note all and be merry as you may, never forgetting that you are alive and that it is good to live.[18]

The philosophy of Chaucer is evident in this passage. We are reminded of the knight, the merchant, the miller, the pardoner, the friar, the summoner of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. How different to Morris's earlier works! Chaucer's philosophy now seems to be his own.

---

[17] He has been accused of being concerned only with the past, though in "The Pilgrims of Hope" he shows concern for contemporary life. Now in Commonweal, he turns to the future.

[18] Feudal England The Collected Works of William Morris, Vol. XXIII, pp. 51-52.

The work from which this passage is taken evidently represents a departure from Morris's earlier conviction and presumably is meant to rally the people of England to look to the future for better things. At the same time, note the title of the work--Feudal England from The Commonweal: it is through the past that the future can be made better for all; and that past goes back to the England of the Middle ages.[19]

Earlier, too, Morris has used his classical stories to construct a story of doom; in this work, he praises Chaucer's use of classical stories to produce

> a superstructure of the quaintest and most adulterated medievalism, as gay and bright as the architecture which his eyes beheld and his pen pictured for us, so clear, defined and elegant it is; a sunny world even amidst its violence and passing troubles . . . a world that scarcely needed hope in its eager life of adventure and love, amidst the sunlit blossoming meadows and green woods, and white be-gilded manor-houses.[20]

Other late works showing kinship with Chaucer are A Dream of John Ball (1886-87) and News From Nowhere (1890). Both of these are in the dream-vision form and in the former, the narration is presented through the persona of Chaucer. The poet's devotion to Chaucer is suggested by Will Green who, in his medieval costume fancies a resemblance to Chaucer. Harry Bailie's genial self steps across the pages for a moment and is gone when the yeoman says, "Look no more on the

---

[19]Morris explains feudal England as reaching its zenith in the fourteenth century. He sees the collapse of Feudalism as the beginning of Capitalism and the attendant evils being experienced in Victorian England (Feudal England, The Collected Works of William Morris, Vol. XXIII, p. 51).

[20]Ibid.

ground as though thow sawest a hare, but let thine eyes and thine ears be busy to gather up tidings to bear back to Essex." News from Nowhere, though ostensibly a forecast of the future is as much a return to Chaucerian England as A Dream of John Ball; for while it projects a Utopian London freed of mechanical fetters--the soap-workers with their smoke-vomiting chimneys, the engineer's works, the lead-works all gone, "and no sound or riveting and hammering came down the west wind from Thorney-croft's"--he also reflects a Chaucerian London when the Thames flowed through a city that is "a continuous garden . . . going down to the water's edge, in which the flowers were now blooming luxuriantly, and sending delicious waves of summer scent over the eddying stream." A similar imagery is portrayed in the Prologue to The Earthly Paradise where direct comparison is made between Chaucer's London and contemporary London.

Morris has been criticised by his contemporaries for his concern with the past. Even some of his supporters compare him to Chaucer on this. Chaucer was interested in his own age, they said.[21] It should be remembered, however, that some of Chaucer's stories also have their setting in the past. His is also a re-telling of old stories with "amplificatio"; re-clothing them with the reality of the contemporary scene. Defenders of Morris are justified in asserting that "if one tell an old story in such a way as to teach a useful

---

[21]Morris's "The Pilgrims of Hope" shows concern for contemporary life. The critics seem to overlook that.

lesson or give inspiration, . . . he is after all, more concerned with his own day than with the past." Tennyson does this in his "Quest for the Holy Grail" when he has King Arthur remain at Camelot to attend to social conditions rather than pursue visions. Through this medieval story, Tennyson gives to his own day a lesson in social responsibility. Browning does something similar in The Ring and the Book--he gives a lesson to the present from the past; Carlyle's Past and Present does no less; and this is exactly what Chaucer himself does in "The Knight's" and "The Clerk's" tales. Critics of Morris might perhaps have profited from a reading of Ruskin in this regard; for while admitting that his observation reveals "that the greatest men, whether poets or historians, live entirely in their own age, and that the greatest fruits of their work are gathered out of their own age,[22] Ruskin attempts to show that time does not figure in the painting of human nature, which is indeed constant enough: "a rogue in the fifteenth century being, at heart, what a rogue is in the nineteenth and was in the twelfth; and an honest or a knightly man being, in like manner, very similar to other such at any other time."[23] Thus it is that Dryden could see prototypes of the people of Chaucer's day around him no more or less than Samuel Butler in his day,

---

[22]The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. V, p. 127.

[23]Ibid.

and we ourselves to-day.[24]

There seem to be as many ways in which Chaucer and Morris are dissimilar as there are ways in which they are alike; still the structural technique of Morris is definitely Chaucerian. And it is not only The Canterbury Tales that is reflected. The Book of the Duchess and The Legend of Good Women share not only the dream-vision technique but other aspects as well. "The Land East of the Sun," probably the most ingenious of the tales of The Earthly Paradise in technique is modelled on Chaucer's device in The Book of the Duchess wherein the dreamer and the figure in the dream are identical. In L'Envoi at the close of The Earthly Paradise we also learn that Morris is under the influence of Chaucer. A reference to 'my Master Geoffrey Chaucer' and to The House of Fame indicates that he professed to be following in the steps of Chaucer; while The Legend of Good Women contains the same unity of style and monotony which we find in The Earthly Paradise, indicating (according to some critics)

---

[24]For Dryden's comment see note 15, chapter 1. Samuel Butler in his day still recognizes all Chaucer's pilgrims "man and woman for man and woman, on board the Lord of the Isles or the Clackton Belle" to Canterbury every Sunday in summer, starting close to the old Tabard, but going "by the South-Eastern railway and come back the same day for five shillings." "They are just the same sort of people," he says. "Why, I have seen the Wife of Bath on the Lord of the Isles myself. . . . eating her luncheon off an Ally Sloper's Half-Holiday . . . . spread out upon her knees." ("For the Ramblings in Cheapside Englarged," Samuel Butler's Notebooks, ed. Geoffrey Keynes and Brian Hill [New York: Dutton and Company, Inc., 1951], p. 231). The only difference here between Chaucer's pilgrims and those seen by Butler seems to be the mode of transportation and the cost.

that the "Legend" might have been the main suggestion for The Earthly Paradise and not The Canterbury Tales.

Despite the wide-spread recognition of Chaucerian influence, a number of critics consider the works to be basically original. Amy Sharp is one such critic. She writes,

> Morris does not invent either his forms or the groundwork of his tales; but taking the old verse or the old legend, he reanimates it, refines away what was coarse in its primitive structure, supplies deficiencies whether in motive or symmetry, breathes new vigour and sweetness into its life, and clothing all with delicate grace and beauty, produce a whole as original in workmanship as it is beautiful in effect.[25]

So she ostensibly shows, that Morris is no imitator, but original; but here are precisely reasons for considering him an imitator of, or of having been influenced by Chaucer: he does to 'olde bokes' just what Chaucer did in The Book of the Duchess, The Parlement of Foules, in some of the tales of The Canterbury Tales--"The Knight's" and "The Clerk's" for example--and particularly what he did with Il Filostrato to produce Troilus and Criseyde. If morris is not an imitator of Chaucer's method he nevertheless is a follower of Chaucer's authority, and so no less a disciple.

Morris himself seems unwilling to affirm Chaucer's influence, although he acknowledges him as his Master. In reply to a German student who questioned the resemblance of his work to Chaucer's, Morris replies,

> it only comes of our both using the narrative method: and even then my turn is decidedly more to Romance than was Chaucer's. I admit that I have been a great admirer

---

[25] Victorian Poets (London, 1891), p. 175.

> of Chaucer, and that his work has had, especially in early years much influence on me, but I think not much on my style. I by nature turn to Romance rather than classicalism and naturally without effort, shrink from rhetoric. I may say that I am fairly steeped in medievalism generally; But the Icelandic Sagas, our own Border Ballads, and Froissart . . . have had as much influence over me as (or more than) anything else.[26]

This half-hearted admission of the influence of Chaucer, however, is in a way admirable. Chaucer, while acknowledging many of his sources, fails even the name of Boccaccio from whom he copied so much. Yet even in this apparent reticence on Morris's part to admit Chaucer's model, he is indicating that influence or a similarity: as Chaucer had no particular style, but rather a mixture of styles, and also avoided rhetoric, Morris here admits the absence of any particular style in his work, as well as a similar avoidance of rhetoric.

But Morris is still willing to claim Chaucer as his Master and pays him tribute on different occasions, three of which are outstanding: the opening of Book XVII in The Life and Death of Jason, L'Envoi which concludes The Earthly Paradise, and the monumental edition--the Kelmscott edition --of Chaucer's Work.

In the opening of Book XVII of The Life and Death of Jason, Morris craves the gift of Chaucer whose poetry, he admits, speaks to nineteenth-century labourers in their unhappy work in the smoke-filled industrial town, after five hundred years.

---

[26]Mackail, The Life of William Morris, Vol. 1, p. 197.

> . . . . Would that I
> Had but some portion of that mastery
> That from the rose-hung lanes of woody Kent
> Through these five hundred years such songs have sent
> To us, who meshed within this smoky net
> Of unrejoicing labour, love them yet.
> And thou, O Master!--Yea, my Master still
> Whatever feet have scaled Parnassus' hill,
> Since like thy measures, clear and sweet and strong,
> Thames stream scarce fettered drave the dace along
> Unto the bastioned bridge, his only chain--
> O Master, pardon me, if yet in vain
> Thou art my Master, and I fail to bring
> Before men's eyes the image of the thing
> My heart is filled with: thou whose dreamy eyes
> Beheld the flush to Cressid's cheeks arise,
> When Troilus rode up the praising street,
> As clearly as they saw thy townsmen meet
> Those who in vineyards of Poictou withstood
> The glittering horror of the steel-topped wood.
> (5-24)

This is a glowing tribute. Morris here covets Chaucer's artistic skill which he claims has immortalized him through five centuries, and for which nineteenth-century inheritors hold him dear. Comparison is made with the industrial town so different to the "rose-hung lanes of woody Kent" in Chaucer's time. One notes his humility as he apologizes and asks forgiveness for any failure on his part to represent his Master fully to the nation as the hero is--whose literary creation of Criseyde's response to victorious Troilus is as vivid as his own response to Englishmen returning from the French wars (a reference to the Hundred Years War between England and France). This mingling of artistic and military imagery seems significant as it seems to indicate that Chaucer's literary contribution to his country is on par with that of military men who have fought in defence of England.

The comparison of Chaucerian and nineteenth-century London seen in this passage is also evidenced in the Prologue to The Earthly Paradise. Morris entreats the Wanderers to forget six counties (the industrial centre of England) plagued with its smoke and steam and machines, and dream of London as it was in Chaucer's time--

> . . . small and white and clean,
> The clear Thames bordered by its gardens green;

to think of it as a port where

> . . . below bridge the green lapping waves
> Smite some few keels that bear Levantine staves,
> Cut from the yew wood on the burnt-up hill,
> And pointed jars that Greek hands toiled to fill,
> And treasured scanty spice from some far sea,
> Florence gold cloth, and Ypres napery,
> And cloth of Bruges, the hogsheads of Guienne;
> While nigh the thronged wharf Geoffrey Chaucer's pen
> Moves over bills of lading--mid such times
> Shall dwell the hollow puppets of my rhymes.

While Morris seems to be separating the industrial from the commercial for obvious reasons, he seems also interested in connecting Chaucer with the activities of his country and not just with poetry. Here is a portrait of Chaucer the civil servant, with his pen in the service of the state as effectively as in the service of poetry.

In L'Envoi Morris repeats his devout praise of Chaucer and reiterates also the humility he has professed at the outset but with the insistence that the book embodies his authentic identity. He admits his discipleship and confesses his limitations--he has not done all he should do, nor has he done all things right, yet he craves some kind of immortality as enjoyed by his Master. With these consider-

ations he sends the Book on a mission (as Chaucer did the Troilus)[27] to the "Land of Matters Unforgot" where his Master Geoffrey Chaucer resides. Should the Book meet Chaucer on the way it should apologize for the mistakes of its author, and ask for a place with him; i.e., for immortality. This is the message the Book will deliver:

> "O Master, O thou great of heart and tongue
> Thou well mayst ask me why I wander here,
> In raiment rent of stories oft besung!
> But of thy gentleness draw thou anear,
> And then the heart of one who held thee dear
> Mayst thou behold! So near as that I lay
> Unto the singer of an empty day.
>
> "O Master, if thine heart could love us yet,
> Spite of things left undone, and wrongly done,
> Some place in loving hearts then should we get,
> For thou, sweet-souled, didst never stand alone,
> But knew'st the joy and woe of many an one--
> By lover's dead, who live through thee we pray
> Help thou us singers of an empty day!"

As Chaucer was concerned over the fate of his book, wishing it to be on the shelves with the great Classics so is Morris concerned that The Earthly Paradise would be placed in the class of Chaucer's works and thereby gain fame for him.

Morris's most emphatic tribute to his Master, however, lies in the Kelmscott edition of Chaucer's works, the

---

[27] Go, litel bok, go litel myn tragedye,
There God thi makere yet, er that he dye,
So sende myght to make in som comedye!
But litel book, no makyng thow n'envie,
But subgit be to alle poesye;
And kis the steppes, wehre as thow seest pace
Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan and Stace (1786-1792)

While Morris seeks immortality, Chaucer is aware that he has already achieved immortality and places himself with other immortals--Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, Stacius. He wants his work to be part of the tradition.

occupation and delight of his latest years, and the final masterpiece of his multiform production. The time and effort spent on this, the greatest achievement of the Kelmscott printing press, speak to the veneration with which he held his Master. This work of love was for five years in project, and three years in preparation. The printing occupied one year and nine months. Eighty-seven pictures by Burne-Jones, a full-page woodcut title, fourteen large borders, eighteen borders for the pictures together with many ornamental initial words and letters designed by Morris himself, all contribute to making the edition the great tribute Morris intended it to be to his great dead Master, his Master still.

Of all Victorian writers William Morris seems to have availed himself most of Chaucer's genius. Drawn to his works probably because of his desire to do for nineteenth-century working-class what Chaucer did for that of the fourteenth century, that is, expose the evils that were forced upon it, he of necessity copies Chaucer's manner of portrayal: the dream-vision form, the story-telling technique, the rhyme royal verse form. Despite these imitations he is unable to develop characters that share the buoyancy and vitality of Chaucer's characters. In his late works he shows appreciation for such factors in Chaucer's works and on occasion we find an intrusion of the Chaucerian character as in "A Dream of John Ball." The physical likeness of the two men as indicated by Pre-Raphaelite painting and Mackail's description may have played a part in cementing Morris's

attachment to Chaucerian formulae in his writing but the main attraction seems to have been literary techniques and medievalism. The various tributes paid to the medieval poet by Morris leave no doubt as to his perception of Chaucer.

# CHAPTER FOUR

## SWINBURNE'S JUDGMENT OF CHAUCER

Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837-1909) is one of the only three English poets from an aristocratic background in the nineteenth century (Byron and Shelley being the others). Protected by social privilege from anxiety about financial resources or public opinion which may handicap less privileged poets in departing from convention (as for instance, Chaucer and Tennyson), his "emotional excess and ideological intransigence went far beyond the bounds of [his] contemporaries."[1] His early education having been provided by a sophisticated mother who was proficient in French and Italian seems to have influenced his early composition of French and Italian verse, the recitation of which he often delighted his school fellows.[2] His enthusiasm for Victor Hugo was of

---

[1]Amy Sharp points out that his career begins in high revolt against reigning principles in morals, religion, and politics; endowed with a boundless gift of utterance, and entrenched in a theory that poetry, being an art, he is privileged to say what he pleases so long as the verses are good. The natural result is an immediate and sharp collision between himself and the many to whose moral or religious sense he has given grievous offence (Victorian Poets, p. 178).

[2]This early contact might also have resulted in so much interest in, and familiarity with French and Italian works that he was later able to detect and criticize what he considered Chaucer's immense borrowing from these sources, which made his own works seem that of the French and the Italian clothed in English.

long standing, and he was later to become addicted to Balzac and Flaubert.[3]

But the main impulse of his intellectual development is concentrated into the channels of English literature. With Morris, he has read Chaucer and the medieval romances, and by 1853 he has acquired an almost complete set of the Aldine Poets which include Spenser, Milton, Chaucer, Burns, Pope, Swift, Thomson, and Young.[4] Like others of the Victorian writers, he is sufficiently interested in Chaucer to view his work relative to its place in English literature, and in comparison with that of other writers of his or preceding periods. He himself has been compared with the great poet. John Drinkwater indicates that "in his exercise of lyrical language and measures, he sums up, as it were, the energy that bore its first-fruits in the poets far back beyond Marlowe, in Surrey and Wyatt, even in Chaucer." But he notes that Swinburne falls short in intellectual and emotional control when compared to Chaucer. Not only has he none of the intellectual control that Chaucer possesses, but his emotions "seem as little subject to any but their own governance as those of the minor poet or the man who is no poet."[5]

---

[3]Lionel Stevenson, "Algernon Charles Swinburne," The Pre-Raphaelite Poets (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1974), Chapter VI.

[4]Humphrey Hare, Swinburne: A Biographical Approach (New York/London: Kennikat Press, 1949, 1970), p. 43.

[5]Swinburne: An Estimate (Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1913, 1969), pp. 36, 55, 56.

Ezra Pound, however, brings him back into Chaucer's rank when he observes that "[the Ballad of Life, the Ballad of Death] and the Triumph of Time are full of sheer imagism, of passages faultless. No one else has made such music in English, I mean has made his kind of music; and it is music which will compare with Chaucer's Hide Absolom thi gilte tresses clere or any other maker you like."[6]

It seems significant and interesting that Swinburne should express quite different views from Morris concerning Chaucer. But, again, Victorians are anything but unified in their opinions on Chaucer. Swinburne voices what might be considered only lukewarm praise of Chaucer, directly and at times indirectly comparing him with other writers. In an essay on William Morris, he usefully contrasts Greek and English poetry, and concludes that neither the Greeks nor the English can boast of many great "tale-tellers" or "sagamen"; but he rejoices that Morris is in one of the select traditions which includes Homer and Chaucer.[7] In his review of Morris's Life and Death of Jason, he refers to the high qualities of "direct narrative power, clear forthright manner of procedure as resembling that in the work of Chaucer, and in a "tongue in cheek" attitude remarks that "even against the great Master his pupil may fairly be matched for simple

---

[6]"Swinburne Versus His Biographers," Literary Essays of Ezra Pound, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), p. 292.

[7]Robert L. Peters, The Crowns of Apollo (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1964), p. 128.

sense of right, for grace and speed of step, for purity and justice of colour," and delivers the ultimate irony with,

> In all the noble role of our poets there has been since Chaucer no second teller of tales, no second rhapsode comparable to the first, till the advent of this one.[8]

He thus places Morris on equal footing with Chaucer.

In attributing these qualities of Chaucer to Morris, Swinburne is indirectly praising them in Chaucer. By adapting the Chaucerian seven-lined stanzas for the sixth scene of Locrine, Swinburne again seems to be voicing some appreciation. Moreover, the spirit of Chaucer himself pervades in these lines from "On a Country Road":

> Along these low pleached lanes, on such a day,
> So soft a day as this, through shade and sun,
> With glad grave eyes that scanned the glad wild way,
> And heart still hovering o'er a song begun,
> And smile that warmed the world with benison,
> Our father, lord long since of lordly rhyme,
> Long since hath haply ridden, when the lime
> Bloomed broad above him, flowering where he came
> Because thy passage once made warm this clime,
> Our father Chaucer, here we praise thy name.

But besides these, there is no evidence of imitation or influence of Chaucer as in the case of Morris.

Although Swinburne seems to delight in these aspects of Chaucer's work, and also in the great tribute paid him by Morris as seen in his letter of July 14 to Morris concerning the Kelmscott Chaucer,[9] he has made some much harsher judg-

---

[8] A. C. Swinburne, Essays and Studies (London: Chatto and Windus, 1876), p. 116; The Fortnightly Review, July, 1867, Vol. II, pp. 22-23, 26, 28.

[9] "Chaucer must be dancing with delight round the Elysian fields. Watts-Dutton says it is and must be the most beautiful book ever printed" (May Morris, William

ments on the poet. Like Arnold he compares Chaucer with both Wordsworth and the French Villon, and finds him inferior to them, though in different aspects. Wordsworth's sublimity is worth all the excellencies of Chaucer put together, he says; and Villon, a "hunted and hungry vagabond," representative of the oppressed people of France, has given them a higher standard of poetry than Chaucer has given the middle class of England. In a letter to Mallarmé on February 5, 1876 he expresses this opinion that the three greatest poets of the Middle Ages are

> Dante, type d l'Italie et de l'aristocratie; Chaucer, type d'Angleterre et de la haute bourgeoisie, Villon, type de la France et du peuple, que je mets après Dante et (malgrè toute mon admiration pour ce grand conteur humoristique et chevalres que) avant Chaucer.[10]

Of the three peoples, he claims the English middle class though the happiest and wisest of the three groups is the least likely to have left them the highest example of poetry possible to men: Chaucer's is the least wonderful and least precious of the three men's poetry; he had less to suffer and to sing about than either Dante or Villon. Swinburne does not give specific reasons for this judgment, or for placing the French above the English poet. However, since he stamps Villon as the "hunted and hungry vagabond,"

---

Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist [Oxford, 1936], Vol. 1, p. 648).

[10]Dante is representative of Italy and of the aristocrats; Chaucer a representative of England and of the middle class; Villon, representative of France and of the lower class, I place before Chaucer in spite of my admiration for the great teller of both humorous and chivalric tales.

differing from Chaucer and Dante in "office and mission," his premise might be based on the difficulty of the situation Villon had to sing about, as well as his own unfortunate position; but when he states that Villon differs from the others in "genius and gift" one wonders on what he bases his estimate.

Further in his analysis there is what might be considered a basis for his judgment: Chaucer's excessive borrowings from abroad (which far exceed that of other poets who may lay claim to equality of rank as national poets) make his work appear to be that of the French or Italian tongue speaking with Teutonic accent through English lips; he was in the main "a French or Italian poet, lined thoroughly and warmly throughout with the substance of an English humorist." In making this judgment, Swinburne overlooks the importance of Chaucer's literary contribution in converting English from an insular to a continental language, with the absorption of foreign words and interchange of ideas and topics as Landor and Clough recognize.[11] Contrary to his position on Chaucer's borrowings, Landor for the same act credits Chaucer with having forged a union between England and Italy in the process, while Clough thinks that through it he has transformed our homely language into a civilized speech.

Besides, as George Perkin Marsh points out, Chaucer

---

[11]See pp. 26, 27, 29 above.

did not introduce into the English language words which it had rejected as alien before, but out of those which had been already received he invested the better portion with the "rights of citizenship," and stamped them with the "mint mark of English coinage. . . ." Marsh further shows that the language at the time needed the reviving.

> Of the Romance words found in [Chaucer's] writings, not much above one hundred have been suffered to become obsolete, while a much larger number of Anglo-Saxon words employed by him have passed altogether out of use.[12]

The linguistic conditions, he concedes, were ready for Chaucer; his introduction of Romance words is less than is supposed as the translation of the Romaunt indicates.[13] As regards borrowing of topics, Marsh shows, too, that the Troilus is not essentially improved by the changes of the translator. It is the great skill in the use of words and the native humour of Chaucer in many portions of the story that makes the difference between the Italian and the English work.[14]

John Richard Green's comment also would defend Chaucer from Swinburne's charge. Taking the Troilus as an example, he suggests that while Chaucer echoes the "joyous carelessness" of the Italian tale, he tempers it with English seriousness.

---

[12]"Chaucer and Gower," Origin and History of the English Language (London, 1862), pp. 381, 382, 385.

[13]Ibid., pp. 390-391.

[14]Ibid., p 419.

> As he follows Boccaccio, all his changes are on the side of purity; and when the Troilus of the Florentine ends with the old sneer at the changeableness of woman, Chaucer bids us "look Godward," and dwells on the unchangeableness of Heaven.

Like Marsh, he notes that it is the genius of Chaucer that counts, and this was neither French nor Italian. Whatever element is borrowed from either literature, that genius is "English to the core" and this is vividly portrayed in Chaucer's reflection of reality and his satire on clerks, for instance.[15]

Even while striking at Chaucer's originality, Swinburne is at the same time praising his gift and use of humour which Chaucer combines with the "inseparable twin-born gift of peculiarly English pathos," and in so doing has actually outdone Boccaccio for pathos in the figures of Arcite and Griselda and might have come even to the "unapproachable" pathos of Dante, had this genius not been accompanied by horror.

> It was only in the world of one who stands far higher above Dante than even Dante can on the whole be justly held to stand above Chaucer, that figures so heavenly as the figures of Beatrice and Matilda could move unspotted and undegraded among figures as earthly as those of the Reeve, the Miller and the Wife of Bath: that a wider if not keener pathos than Ugolino's or Francesca's could alternate with a deeper if not richer humour than that of Absalom and Nicholas.[16]

In the same vein Chaucer is praised for the happiness he

---

[15] A Short History of the English People (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1960), 2 Vols., Vol. 1, p. 207.

[16] The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise (New York: Russell and Russell, 1925, 1968), 15 Vols., Vol. XIV, pp. 98-99.

exudes. Though exceeded by Dante and Villon in depth of passion and height of rapture, yet in ardour and intensity of vision or of sense, "in happy perfection of manhood" Chaucer is their superior. Exclusive of Sophocles, he is the happiest of the poets, their sovereign example of noble and manly happiness. Only Ariosto can be compared to him in masculine power of enjoyment: his legend and romance give laughter, just as Chaucer's poetry gives enjoyment in the so-called "age of faith" when many believe happiness could be found only in a book and a building--the Bible and the Church.[17]

In comparison with Wordsworth (according to Swinburne), Chaucer lacks the sublimity that Wordsworth possesses in such large measure. He considers Chaucer a great writer, and a great man; "he has every gift which goes to the making of a poet except the one which alone can make a poet, in the proper sense of the word, great." Neither pathos nor humour nor fancy nor invention will suffice for that, he says.

> No poet is great as a poet whom no one could ever pretend to recognise as sublime. Sublimity is the test of imagination as distinguished from invention or from fancy: and the first English poet whose powers can be called sublime was Christopher Marlowe.[18]

Undoubtedly Swinburne is indirectly attributing to Chaucer

---

[17] The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Vol. XIV, pp. 99-101.

[18] "Christopher Marlowe," The Age of Shakespeare (New York: AMS Press Inc., 1965), p. 1; Thomas Conolly, Swinburne's Theory of Poetry (Albany: State University of New York, 1964), p. 61.

the literary qualities of pathos, humour, fancy, and invention, but denying him sublimity and with that, imagination. Swinburne's clearest interpretation of imagination is made in the Nineteenth Century (June 1866). There he states that "mere literary power, mere poetic beauty, mere charm of passionate or pathetic fancy" can be found in varying degrees in all poets, but the crowning gift of imagination was given only to Shakespeare and to Webster. Swinburne thus skilfully links sublimity to imagination which seems to parallel Coleridge's secondary imagination that creates and makes live the objects that it presents.[19] Even then he denies Chaucer that "crowning gift of imagination" which he says, belongs only to Shakespeare and Webster.

On the other hand, if sublimity in this case is taken to mean exalted language, although it might be justifiably applied to Marlowe, considered by Swinburne the first poet whose powers can be called sublime, we might ask for justification when he declares that Wordsworth's sublimity is worth all the excellencies of Chaucer put together.[20]

---

[19]"Passion and Imagination," Swinburne's Theory of Poetry, pp. 60-61. See also The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Vol. XI, p. 281. It is true that much of Chaucer's work is written in "homely" language, but there is a reason for this: it was for the ease of comprehension of his audience, for the most part common people. Nor should this simple language be adversely criticized, but rather commended, as Ian Robinson notes that it is this very fact that justifies Chaucer's title, "Father of English Literature."

[20]But Chaucer was also capable of exalted and learned speech as exemplified in The Book of the Duchess which was written for the Court, The House of Fame, Troilus

Furthermore, in Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth frowns on lofty language,[21] and notes that the affecting parts of Chaucer are almost always expressed in language pure and universally intelligible even to this day.[22]

Swinburne also ranks Chaucer below Shakespeare, Milton and Shelley.

> It is through no lack of love and reverence for the name of Chaucer that I must question his right, though the first narrative poet of England, to stand on that account beside her first dramatic, her first epic, or her first lyric poet. But, being certainly unprepared to admit his equality with Shakespeare, Milton, and with Shelley, I would reduce Mr. Rossetti's mystic four to the old sacred number of three. Pure or mere narrative is a form essentially and avowedly inferior to the lyrical or the dramatic form of poetry; and the finer line of distinction which marks it from the epic marks it also thereby as inferior.[23]

This is indeed a strong justification if not quite a dismissal of Chaucer's claim to high rank among the poets. But Thomas Conolly reminds us that with relatively few exceptions, Swinburne's critical works are devoted to lyrical and dramatic poetry; narrative and epic receive only passing attention from him. He never tires of his insistence of the superiority of lyric and dramatic over other forms, insisting

---

and Criseyde, and "The Knight's Tale."

[21] Prose of the Romantic Period, ed. Carl R. Woodring (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), pp. 51-52.

[22] Ibid., p. 52n.

[23] The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, Vol. XIV, p. 98. William Rossetti in Lives of Famous Poets had selected Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Shelley as composing "the supreme quadrilateral of English song"; thus Swinburne's reference to Rossetti.

that it is equally certain that of all forms or kinds of poetry the two highest are the lyric and the dramatic.[24]

Swinburne seems a perfect example of the kind of bias with which Chaucer is perceived by some Victorians. Unlike Arnold, who presumably has done only limited reading of Chaucer and thus possesses only limited knowledge, Swinburne seems to have had a great knowledge of Chaucer's work. He praises his narrative power, his humour, his pathos, and invention, yet attacks his style and, more astonishingly, his originality. Swinburne's greatest affront to Chaucer seems to be this attack. But Chaucer's successful use of French and Italian words and sources is precisely one reason for his great reputation as a poet, even among other Victorians: his ability to take another work, discard the 'chaf' and with the 'corn' create an entirely new work. This is in consonance with the rhetorical tradition he followed and attained mastery of, as seen in his 'translatio' of _Il Filostrato_. Chaucer himself at the end of _Troilus_ confirms this, and supporters of Morris, recognizing how great an art this was, even attempt to ascribe it to Morris as well.

---

[24] _Swinburne's Theory of Poetry_, p. 51. See also _The complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne_, Vol. XV, pp. 397, 464.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## TENNYSON'S HOMAGE TO CHAUCER

> Chaucer was to [my father] a kindred spirit, as a lover of nature and as a word-painter of character: and he enjoyed reading him aloud more than any poet except Shakespeare and Milton.

This opinion of Hallam Tennyson's is gleaned from his father's criticisms on poets who, he says, "enrich the blood of the world."[1] Obviously, Chaucer is one of those poets. The frequent references of Charles Tennyson to his grandfather's reading of Chaucer to his wife whenever they were alone,[2] supported by an April 1856 letter of Emily's written from Yarmouth where the Tennysons had been residing for a while, making a decision regarding redecoration of a newly acquired home, testify to Tennyson's admiration of the medieval poet.[3] In the plan of the new home on Blackdown (Black Horse Copse), provision was made for devices emblematic of Alfred's favourite modern poets to be carved on the dining-room mantlepiece, and Chaucer was included along with

---

[1]Hallam Tennyson, Alfred Lord Tennyson (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1897), pp. 284, 502.

[2]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson (Archon Books, 1968), pp. 279, 303.

[3]The Letters of Emily Lady Tennyson, ed. James O. Hoge (University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974), p. 98.

Milton, Wordsworth, Goethe, and Dante.[4] A favourite passage of Tennyson's, says Hallam, is that in "The Knight's Tale" where Arcite, dying, commends his soul as a legacy to his love Emilie:

> "Naught may the woful spirit in myn herte
> Declare o point of alle my sorwes smerte
> To yow, my lady, that I love moost;
> But I biquethe the servyce of my goost
> To yow aboven every creature,
> Syn that my lyf may no lenger dure.
> Allas, the wo! allas, the peynes stronge
> That I for yow have suffred, and so longe!
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
>
> What is this world? what asketh men to have?
> Now with his love, now in his colde grave
> Allone, withouten any compaignye"
> (2765-2779)

This seems to indicate Tennyson's concern with one of Chaucer's topics: love as fulfillment.

Besides these superficial references, there are in Tennyson's works some very significant indications that he was so great an admirer of the medieval poet that at times he seems to copy some of his techniques or to agree with them. In Memoriam, for example, like The Canterbury Tales, while it has individual sections on personal "stories" can be viewed as a vision of life, or as Tennyson called it, "The Way of the Soul," just as The Canterbury Tales portrays the pilgrimage of life. Like The Canterbury Tales, also, In Memorian is addressed to the contemporary age, and becomes less and less a private poem as Tennyson becomes acquainted with his people.

---

[4]Charles Tennyson, Alfred Tennyson, p. 372.

Tennyson seems also to have imitated Chaucer's dream-vision technique in "A Dream of Fair Women." According to Dwight Culler, in this poem, "Tennyson is combining Chaucer's Legend of Good Women with the techniques of Dante, but . . . modernizes the medieval dream-vision by comparing the poet to a balloonist, who is self-poised, nor fears to fall." In a revised version, continues Culler, "he eliminates the balloon and is held above his subject by his knowledge of Chaucer's art--a knowledge, however, which does not give him command of his subject but rather makes him hesitate to speak."[5]

Certainly, in the poem, Tennyson seems more concerned with the artist's skill than with his subject-matter, as exemplified in the following stanzas:

> I read, before my eyelids dropt their shade,
> 'The Legend of Good Women,' long ago
> Sung by the morning star of song, who made
> His music heard below;
>
> Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath
> Preluded those melodious bursts that fill
> The spacious times of great Elizabeth
> With sounds that echo still.
>
> And, for a while, the knowledge of his art
> Held me above the subject, as strong gales
> Hold swollen clouds from raining, though my heart,
> Brimful of those wild tales
>
> Charged both mine eyes with tears. . . .

The first two lines are a seeming imitation of Chaucer's art, following a practice of Chaucer in the Dream-poems, where he reads 'olde bokes' before falling

---

[5]The Poetry of Tennyson (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977), p. 23.

asleep; only in this case the 'olde boke' is Chaucer's to whom the succeeding six lines pay a splendid tribute. "Morning star of song" carries the same meaning recognized by others before, and contemporary with Tennyson: the first of our poets; a forerunner of the great Elizabethan poets, his work still lives. "The knowledge of his art" bespeaks a deeper meaning than mere familiarity with it; rather, a recognition of its greatness. Only after he has reflected on the magnitude of Chaucer's skill as an artist is he able to show concern for the ladies in the tales. The rest of the poem takes up the subject of women and love, and following on Chaucer's technique, Tennyson writes his own version of a legend of women who all gave their lives for some aspect of love.[6]

Of course, "A Dream of Fair Women" has its source in Chaucer, but of Chaucer's ten martyrs, only Cleopatra is among Tennyson's women who die in the cause of love. Tennyson's opinion of her might have been quite different had he not read and accepted Chaucer's information regarding the Egyptian Queen. For Cleopatra's image had been clouded by the tones of luxury, lust, corruption and death that surrounded Egypt and Egyptian women, according to Savary.[7]

---

[6]"A Dream of Fair Women," The Poems of Tennyson, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longman Group Limited, 1969), ll. 440-453. Other citations of Tennyson's poetry refer to this edition.

[7]Letters on Egypt, trans. from the French of M. Savary (London, 1887), Vol. I, chapter 15; Vol. II, chapter 15. Savary gives insight into the customs of Egyptian women,

"She had seduced the frigid Caesar into luxury . . . captured and ruined the virile Antony by her charms; her failure to ensnare the cold Octavian led to the subjection of her country; and she killed herself by the bite of an asp." It was only after reading Chaucer's version of Cleopatra and finding an image of a Queen which prescribed her as loyal and of unalloyed worth that Tennyson could give voice to a different impression of her, that he could use her as an example. For Chaucer presents her as Antony's second wife; she fled from the battle of Actium only after it was lost, after Antony himself had fled, and she mourned him in unspeakable sorrow. She even caused a magnificent shrine to be built for his corse.[8] So Tennyson echoes Chaucer:

> In every land
> [He] saw, wherever light illumineth,
> Beauty and anguish walking hand in hand
> The downward slope to death.
> (13-16)

"The Palace of Art" also seems to echo Chaucer. Not only is the Dream-vision technique evident, but the dream of pictures in the palace seems akin to Chaucer's vision in The House of Fame.

Whether or not Tennyson imitated Chaucer also in striving for perfection, it might be said (as Furnivall

---

their love for, and obsession with material things; and William Paden expresses how Cleopatra might have been affected by these practices (Tennyson in Egypt [New York: Octagon Books, 1971], Chapter IV).

[8]"The Legend of Cleopatra," in The Legend of Good Women, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, pp. 496-497.

observes) that the two poets are alike in perfection of metre.[9] Like Chaucer an innovator and experimenter, he was greatly interested in, and gave much thought to, the improving of his craft as seen in the allegorical "Ulysses," and as early as "Locksley Hall" he decided to write in easy rhythm and metre in order that his work would be appreciated by everyone.[10] Like Chaucer, too, he became an excellent metrist. Moreover, his practice of intensive revision, like Chaucer's, gives his work the perfection he sought.

The two poets are, again, alike in their love of fair and good women. Chaucer's Duchess, Emilie, Constance, Griselda, as well as his "good women" share these epithets with Tennyson's "fair women," Isabel, Mariana, Lady of Shallot, Princess Ida, Miller's and Gardener's daughters, Dora, and his beloved Rosa. Nowhere in the work of these poets are we presented with loathsome, wicked women.[11]

---

[9]F. J. Furnivall, "Recent Work at Chaucer," Macmillan's Magazine, March, 1873, Vol. XXVII, p. 389.

[10]This idea parallels Chaucer's effort to write in a language accessible to everyone.

[11]However, the view of Tennyson's women as being associated with "delicate flowers," the image of his "high-born maiden" as symbolizing "the brooding soul," his Lady of Shallot and Mariana "as subtle projections of the poet's spirit" are foreign to Chaucer. Chaucer does give a standard medieval physical description of his young women--Emilie of "The Knight's Tale," White of The Book of the Duchess, Alisoun of "The Miller's Tale" etc.--but only Emilie approaches anything like the beauties of nature expressed above when, as Ruskin points out, Chaucer makes her the only comparison of a mistress to the sun: "Uprose the Sonne, and up rose Emilie"; and only Griselda and Constance are idealized in such a way as perhaps to approach the "soul." Chaucer's women for the most part seem to be less chaste subjects and more sexual

But the greatest of the similarities between the two poets seems to be in their unhappy early lives. Again, Furnivall reminds us that Chaucer began his life with bitterly disappointing love, the pangs of which "shot through him for many a year before he could write the merry lines which laugh with gladness still";[12] and Tennyson was haunted

---

objects and like those of Tennyson's middle period seem to be for the satisfaction of man's sexual urge (Sex and Marriage in Victorian Politics, p. 111).

[12]"Recent Work at Chaucer," p. 387. In "The Complaint unto Pity" Chaucer tells of his rejection in love; of his swooning and becoming "Ded as a ston, while that the swogh [him] laste"; of his craving the mercy and love of her whom he discovered had no pity for him--

> "Have mercy on me, thow herenus quene,
> That yow have sought so tendirly and yore;
> Let som strem of youre lyght on me be sene
> That love and drede yow, ever lenger the more.
> For, sothly for to seyne, I bere the soore;
> And, though I be not konnynge for to pleyne,
> For Goddis love, have mercy on my peyne!
>
> "My peyne is this, that what so I desire
> That have I not, ne nothing lyk therto;
> And ever setteth Desir myn hert on fire.
> Eke on that other syde, where so I goo,
> What maner thing that may encrese my woo,
> That have I redy, unsoght, everywhere;
> Me [ne] lakketh but my deth, and than my bere.
> (91-105)

In The Book of the Duchess Chaucer again reiterates his experience of unrequited love--he cannot sleep at night and cannot tell why.

> . . . but trewly, as I gesse,
> I holde hit be a sicknesse
> That I have suffred this eight year,
> And yet my boote is never the ner;
> For there is phisicien but oon
> That may me hele; but that is don.
> Passe we over untill eft.
> That will not be mot nede be left;
> (35-42)

throughout his early years with family problems: the unhappy marriage of his parents, the death of his father, consideration for his lonely mother, as well as his own unhappy love affair--his love for, and rejection by, Rosa Baring,[13] and his long-delayed marriage to Emily Sellwood--all contributed to his sour youth.[14]

But even in these parallels there are significant points of contrast between the two poets. Unlike Chaucer, who did not allow his early disappointment in love to dwell with him to the end of his days, Tennyson carried the sorrows of his youth to the end of his life, giving a sombre tone to much of his verse, making him incapable of Chaucer's

---

[13]See "Thy rosy lips are soft and sweet," "To Rosa," "Early Verses of Compliment to Miss Rosa Baring," "Sweet ask me not why I am sad"; the sonnets "Ah, fade not yet from out the green arcades," "I lingered yet awhile to bend my way," "How thought you that this thing could captivate," "Three Sonnets to a Coquette."

[14]Both poets, however, use the unhappy experiences to poetic advantage. By them, Chaucer was able to identify and sympathise with some of his characters: the suffering lover of "Pity," the mourning Duke of Lancaster, the forsaken Mars, the abandoned Anelida, the lovelorn Dido, as well as the deserted Troilus of whom he was to write:

> But forth hire cours Fortune ay gan to holde.
> Criseyde loveth the sone of Tideüs,
> And Troilus moot wepe in cares colde.
> Swich is this world, whoso it kan byholde:
> In ech estat is litel hertes reste.
> God leve us for to take it for the beste!
> (Troilus and Criseyde, Bk. V. ll 1745-1750)

And Tennyson in "Maud," in In Memoriam, expresses his sorrow, his inner feeling; in "Locksley Hall," his past, his parental concerns, and Amy's marriage (a reminder of his bitter love experience) in "Hamlet-like soliloquies" in the dramatic monologue.

buoyancy and laughter. The Rosa Baring affair leaves some bitterness reflected in such poems as "Locksley Hall," "Edwin Morris," Aylmer's Field," "The Flight," "Maud" in what he terms "marriage-hindering Mammon" which he sees as a contemporary social issue.

Unlike, too, are the poets' ways of handling contemporary problems in society. Chaucer portrays them humourously; Tennyson wrestles with them. Consider, for instance, the poets' reactions to sexuality either in marriage or outside that sacred institution. Chaucer expresses (and humourously too) what Tennyson and many Victorians find disquieting, the basic human tendency to break social taboos (See Appendix).

It is clear that the Victorian just did not in every way imitate Chaucer. He did consistently pay him homage.

Tennyson's admiration of Chaucer, then, apparently led to examination of his work and imitation of certain aspects. He moves from classical to romantic, to nature poet; from private concerns--personal love and family affairs, but primarily a concern for his poetic craft--to public issues, particularly those relating to the common man, just as Chaucer does. He develops similar skills--narrative, dramatic, lyrical, metrical; and his main topics are the same--nature, love, women. He copies the Dream-vision technique using even Chaucer's subjects--women and art--and, like Chaucer in "The Clerk's" and "The Man of Law's" tales, uses the child as a symbol of reconciliation, reunion, redemption in "The Two Voices" and "The Princess." Both poets are

concerned with an after-life, yet mindful of this life's conditions--Chaucer in a revelatory role, Tennyson leaning toward reformation. Their differing views on contemporary questions may be due more to changes in ideas and philosophies from period to period than to any disagreement in their own views.

Tennyson's imitation of Chaucer's techniques leaves no doubt as to his estimate of the earlier poet. Chaucer is represented in emblematic carvings along with Milton, Dante, Wordsworth, Goethe in the room Tennyson frequents most in his home. Indeed, Tennyson seems to have him in the highest rank of poets--as he says, poets who "enrich the blood of the world."

# CHAPTER SIX

## RUSKIN'S INTERPRETATION OF CHAUCER

A Victorian perspective of Chaucer might be considered inadequate without the inclusion of an evaluation by one of the most prolific and respected writers of the period, John Ruskin. Like some of the other Victorians, he especially admires the medieval past and its values; thus his recognition of, and admiration for, Geoffrey Chaucer as a part of that valued past. His admiration is perhaps best expressed in a statement made in his Lectures on Art (1870): "I think the most perfect type of a true English mind in its best possible temper is that of Chaucer."[1] Other expressions of recognition and admiration may be perceived in the more than one-hundred references to him, to a proposed edition of selections from Chaucer's works among the volumes designed for his Library of Classical Literature (although this was not accomplished), and in his recommendation of Chaucer among others in the compilation of a body of secular literature for St. George's School. Some of Ruskin's references, statements and proposals suggest his motivation, his reasons for admiring Chaucer, and the way in which he interpreted Chaucer's works.

---

[1] The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XX, p. 29.

In his Lectures on Art, Ruskin tells us that English writers possess one strange but quite essential character: "a delight in the forms of burlesque which are connected in some degree with the foulness of evil"; "whenever Englishmen are wholly without this instinct, their genius is comparatively weak and restricted." He personally identifies Chaucer with this evil in literature by pointing out that while this "perfect type of a true English mind is for the most part full of thoughts of beauty, pure and wild like that of an April morning, there are . . . sometimes momentarily jesting passages which stoop to play with evil."[2] The creation of such passages and accompanying gross characters, Ruskin continues, "afterwards degenerate into forms of humour which render some of quite the greatest, wisest and most moral of English writers now almost useless for our youth."[3] But in his recommendation for the inclusion of some of Chaucer's work in the literature for St. George's School, and in the poetry reading of the upper classes in other schools,[4] Ruskin seems not to consider Chaucer among the literary casualties. Furthermore, his placing of Chaucer's work (exclusive of The Canterbury Tales) among those of the seven authors whose writings he thinks "have taught the purest theological truth hitherto known to the

---

[2] The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XX, p. 29.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

Jews, Greeks, Latins, Italians and English,"[5] seems a positive endorsement of Chaucer even as one of the Classics, a place which Arnold denies him. Moreover, he also considers him among the prophets of God, and his words as testimonies of the Lord.[6]

What are we to deduce from this inconsistency in the evaluation of writers? Why have other writers become casualties to grossness, jesting and evil, and why is Chaucer spared? and why with all his praise for Chaucer has Ruskin seen fit to exclude The Canterbury Tales from those writings that have taught "theological truth"? Nowhere does Ruskin explicitly answer these questions; but in his Essay on Literature there are certain statements which might help us to arrive at some answers. He writes,

> . . . we hope . . . you are not one of those philosophers, falsely so named, who assert in the teeth of reason, and to the injury of the cause of religion, that whatever is amusing must be criminal; that a grave countenance and severe demeanour are the true signs of sanctity of mind and consequent morality of conduct; that austerity is the companion of innocence, and gloom of religion. . . . we know that morality may be radiant with smiles and robed in rejoicing; and we do not deprecate, because we despise the objections of those who affirm that all pleasure is necessarily evil, and all enjoyment inevitably crime.
>
> Fiction should not be confused with falsehood. The characters in works of fiction are representative of men in general, are persons who have existed and will exist again, modified only by the manners prevailing at certain periods, doing what has been done, feeling what has been felt, thinking what has been thought, and will be

---

[5] The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XXVII, p. 500; Vol. XXIX, pp. 192-194. The other writers so honoured are Moses, David, Hesiod, Virgil, and St. John the Divine.

[6] Ibid., Vol. XXIX, p. 56.

> done, felt, and thought again.[7]

This statement is so much in keeping with Chaucer's work that two of the questions posed here could be answered by reference to that work: it is good reading for "our youth" because they can discern in what might be considered fictitious characters (although perhaps all are not fictitious to Chaucer) not only resemblances to those around them, but also evils to avoid and morals to imitate. "The Pardoner's Tale," for example, is one such didactic work. It carries a moral warning. "The Merchant's Tale" is an apparent immoral story that can be viewed realistically and also didactically.[8]

As to the exclusion of The Canterbury Tales from the writings that Ruskin thinks have taught the "purest theological truth," one can only assume that, like Arnold, Ruskin might not have been enamoured by the apparently unedifying language of the fabliaux (especially considering his early

---

[7] "Essay on Literature," The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. I.

[8] T. W. Craik says, "The Merchant's Tale" is dirty enough, like some of the other comic ones, in its way; but Chaucer's sureness of touch, as an artist and as a man, makes the dirt a pure kind of dirt, and the story one at which we can be glad" (The comic Tales of Chaucer [London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1964], p. 153). Another critic considers it "a wholesome serious treatment of an unpleasant subject." It may also be viewed as a recreating of the Eden story on the pilgrimage of life. So although Chaucer's work may contain grossness, jestings, and evil, it contains reality and therefore it lives. The same cannot be said of the foulness in the works of some other writers and so they become useless for "our youth," as Ruskin claims.

training) though not by moral implications.[9] In spite of this reservation, Ruskin views Chaucer's work in a favourable light. This is one Englishman whose genius he would perhaps consider "comparatively weak and restricted" if he were "wholly without the instinct" of "delight in the forms of burlesque which are connected in some way with the foulness of evil." The "fimetic" taint recognizable in Chaucer's works is not of much importance to Ruskin, it seems, since he sees Chaucer as capable of throwing off the lower part of his nature as he would a rough dress and therefore able to write with great personal character.[10]

Ruskin definitely does not place Chaucer in the second rank of poets as Arnold does. He ranks him with Spenser, Byron, Scott, and Tennyson in beauty;[11] with Dante, Shakespeare, Spenser, Sidney, Douglas in rhyme, claiming that the loveliest pieces of Christian language in Chaucer are in rhyme;[12] with Giotto in humour, in clearsightedness, dislike of falsehood in clergy or in professedly pious people.[13] As a prophet or priest for ennobling human life, he is included among the prophets of God, and Ruskin concurs

---

[9]This assumption, however, would nullify the preceding quotation.

[10]The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XXVII, p. xxxix.

[11]Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 335.

[12]Ibid., Vol. XXXIV, p. 338.

[13]Ibid., Vol. XXIII, p. 340.

with Spenser that Chaucer is, indeed, the "well of English undefiled."

But amid all these laudatory expressions, there seem to appear some critical reservations. Like Homer, the Greek Tragedians, Plato, Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe, Chaucer has been enigmatic, Ruskin believes.[14] Like them, he has "hidden all that is chiefly serviceable in [his] work, and in all the various literature [he] absorbed and re-embodied under types which have rendered it quite useless to the multitude."[15] This last, does not seem quite agreeable to all. Swinburne for one, disagrees.[16]

Ruskin seems also to consider Chaucer's work of historical importance. In a literary miscellany intended, as was Fors Clavigera (in this aspect of it), to have a historical purpose, Chaucer is quoted frequently and is grouped with French chivalric literature which he partly translated. In addition, as "the most perfect type of a true English mind in its best possible temper," Chaucer is recommended among the texts for reading in schools, reading which Ruskin states should include in part stories which, whether prose or poetry, should be true history, travels, romance, or fairy-tales.[17] All these factors are reflected in Chaucer's

---

[14] The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XVII, p. 208; Vol. II, pp. 178-180.

[15] Ibid.

[16] See p. 61.

[17] The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XXIX, p. 502.

works. The inclusion seems especially significant as he notes that Chaucer signals in English the second phase of human development that comes in the history of nations (or of individuals); that is, the colonization period, a period of hope and the coming into existence of a people.[18]

Ruskin seems also to commend Chaucer's treatment of women. He tells us in his discourse on women in literature that there is something to be said of Chaucer's writing a Legend of Good Women, but none of good men, and supports his interest by readings from that work of Chaucer's. In his discourse on Theseus,[19] The Athenian hero, and the drawings and writings illustrating

> . . . the labyrinth which the Cretan Dedalus built,
> Out of which nobody could get who was inside,
> Except Theseus; nor could he have done it, unless he
> had been helped with a thread by Adriane, all for love

he is calling attention to woman's high role, especially as labyrinth's engraved on many Christian churches were symbolic of the Divine grace which alone can extricate men from the mazes of sin and error. In this he wants to be one with Chaucer, as he mentions Chaucer's response to the caluminous notion that Theseus deserted his Savior-mistress: he wishes him Devil-speed instead of God-speed--

"A twenty devil way the wind [thee] drive."[20]

---

[18]The age of triumph "in labour of the hands and song on the lips," however, is represented by Shakespeare, the noblest son of the nation (The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XXXI, pp. 21-22).

[19]"The Labyrinth," The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XXVII, pp. 394-416.

[20]"Legenda Adriana de Athenes," The Legende of Goode Women, 292.

Ruskin, at a glance, seems to view Chaucer's position regarding women as in stark contrast to that of the nineteenth century where she is not to guide (as Griselda and Constance did) or even to think for herself; the man is always to be the wiser, to be the thinker, the ruler, the superior in knowledge and discretion, as in power. Ruskin, on the surface, seems to disagree with this position citing in support, examples not only from Chaucer, but from other writers as well: the catastrophe of every Shakespearean play is caused by the fault or the folly of a man; the redemption, if any, by the wisdom and virtue of a woman; all Spenser's fairy knights are sometimes deceived and sometimes vanquished, but the soul of Una is never darkened, nor is the spear of Britomart ever broken;[21] the great Egyptian people gave to their spirit of wisdom the form of a woman and into her hand, as a symbol, the weaver's shuttle. He points to the part chivalry played in extolling the woman--an absolute yielding of obedient devotion by the lover to his mistress; the subjection of the young knight to the command of his lady, and compares this to nineteenth-century attitude.[22]

---

[21] The Fairie Queene, Bks. V, III, XI, X, The Complete works of Spenser, ed. R. E. Neil Dodge (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936).

[22] The nineteenth century, he says, speaks evil of ladies and knights, even saints, and all that made them noble in past days; whereas Chaucer spoke evil of Criseyde only, for which he felt his conscience pricked, and it brought on him the God of love's anger at his drawing too near to the daisy:

Yet Ruskin is ambivalent on the subject of women. No sooner has he given us the feeling of female equality if not superiority than he qualifies the idea by distinguishing significantly between the married and the unmarried relationship. In the marriage relationship, he points out, the affection has become wholly and limitlessly our own, and the characters so sifted and tried that we do not fear to entrust it with the happiness of our loves. Marriage marks the vowed transition of temporary into untiring service, and of fitful into eternal love; thus a change is advocated. And so we find Ruskin giving another view--a woman's true mission is to guide and uplift her more sophisticated and intelligent male: "But the woman's power is for rule, not for battle and her intellect is not for invention or creation but for sweet ordering or arrangement and decision.[23] While this might

---

I, knelyng by this flour, in good entente,
Abood to knowen what this peple mente,
As stille as any ston; til at the laste
This god of Love on me hys eyen caste,
And seyde, "Who kneleth there?" and I answered
Unto his askynge, whan that I it herde,
And seyde, "Sir, it am I" and com him ner,
And salwed him. Quod he, "What dostow her
So nygh myn oune floure, so boldely?
Yt were better worthy, trewely,
A worm to neghen ner my flour than thow."
"And why, sire," quod I, "and yt lyke yow?"
"For thow," quod he, "art therto nothing able."
(F308-320)

Ruskin is inconsistent in his reasoning regarding the occassion for this passage and reproof, charging it first to Chaucer's admonition of Theseus (because he should not have believed such things of Theseus). (The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XXXII, p. 406).

[23]He nevertheless thinks there is no superiority of

appear challenging to male superiority, or giving a signal for the equality of the sexes, the woman's guidance and rule were limited to the home and moral idealism, never meant for the area of politics, government or business as is clearly seen in Ruskin's discourse on the education of women.[24]

After reading this, one might wonder what Ruskin really thought of Chaucer's treatment of women. Of course, all Chaucer's women, the Wife of Bath excluded, cleave to the medieval concept of the place of women in society: unconditional obedience to husband as the Bible bids them (Ephesians 5:22, 23; Colossians 3:18),[25] and the practice of this in society, reinforced by homiletic teaching of the fourteenth century, mindful of possible ill results of disobedience.[26] Griselda's marriage is the stark example of

---

one sex to the other; each has what the other has not; each completes the other, and is completed by the other; the happiness and perfection of both depends on each asking and receiving from the other what the other only can give.

[24]"Of Queen's Garden," The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XVIII. In spite of Griselda's subjection to Walter, she was involved in government. This is against Ruskin's view.

[25] Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.
For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the Church: and he is the saviour of the body (Ephesians).

The passage in Colossians carries an identical message.

[26]Nicholas Bozon speaks of a "vice of married doves . . . that of disobedience to the wishes of their rightful lords and masters." He reminds women that the first womanly virtue is to obey. John Bromyard, a Dominican, agrees: "There is common amongst [women] a certain unnatural condi-

feminine obedience (both before and after marriage) even in the face of apparent male cruelty,[27] and wifely obedience to husband and lord was a specific virtue exalted in medieval society. The Legend of Good Women extols another virtue--faithfulness in women. In citing this work, and in his ambivalent stand as expressed in "Of Queen's Garden" Ruskin seems to be reinforcing the idea of woman's faithfulness as well as their subordination. In Modern Art this faithfulness unto death is again expressed. This I will discuss in the section on love.

Ruskin's discussion of women, relative to Chaucer's view on them, goes even into the area of apparel. A diary note of September 23, 1883 reads: "Today, found in the Persone's Tale, all I want about dress for women."[28] He is referring to Chaucer's Parson's comment:

> Now, as of the outrageous array of wommen, God woot that though the visages of somme of hem seme ful chaast and

---

tion of contrariety, or wilfulness, which is one of the risks which every intending husband must be prepared to face." Not only was disobedience to husband considered disobedience to God's law, it seems to have carried a curse with it as Bromyard's story in support of the wilfulness of wives seems to indicate: a husband went to town one day leaving a single instruction: his wife should not climb a certain rotten ladder in one of the rooms. She did just that, then fell and broke both legs (Gerald Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, pp. 389-390) Cf. the theological counterpart--Eve's wilfulness which caused the Fall according to Milton's account in Paradise Lost. Of the Genesis account, medieval women were well aware.

[27]"The Clerk's Tale," ll. 430-441.

[28]The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin, ed. Helen Gill Viljoen (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 337.

> debonaire, yet notifie they in hire array of atyr likerousnesse and pride./ I sey nat that honestitee in clothynge of man or woman is uncovenable, but certes the superfluitee or disordinat scantitee of clothynge is reprevable. ("The Parson's Tale," The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, p. 240).

Ruskin has not commented further on this but one can deduce that his view is in accord with Chaucer's. A woman's clothing can be a symbol of pride and lechery--two of the deadly sins--and Ruskin as well as Chaucer's parson would perhaps like ladies to pay attention to sobriety in dress.

On the question of love, Ruskin's explication of "the two great loves" seems an endorsement of Chaucer's subject. For him, the two great loves as he differentiates them--that of husband and wife representing generally the family affections, and that of mankind to which, at need, the family affection must be sacrificed--include, rightly understood, all the noble sentiments of humanity. Modern philosophy of love, he maintains, considers this idea of love absurd and happily almost extinct, leaving the only proper and possible motives of human action to be "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" as expressed by the Apostle John (I John 11:16). But these aspects of interpretations of love are not new. They were considered by Chaucer too. Chaucer was also especially mindful of the love of mankind, the 'commune profyt' as he calls it.[29] His treatment of

---

[29]While this may enter into the area of government and politics, it may also be explained as natural love--'love of kynde'--and thus enters also the area of sexual love for its ordained purpose--the continuation of the human specie.

married love, however, was, more often than not, reduced in some form or another to lust of the flesh, except perhaps in The Book of the Duchess and in "The Man of Law's Tale" where Constance (perhaps the Duchess, also) is portrayed as the idealized picture of womanhood. It is his treatment of Divine love, however, that is most appealing. In Book V of Troilus and Criseyde he attempts to equate the sexual love of Troilus and Criseyde (which hitherto had been considered immoral) with the Boethian Philosophy of Divine love that holds the world together, from the point of view that sexual love is a natural act.[30] In the end, viewing all wordly happenings as transient, in the mouth of Troilus he substitutes Christian love as the only kind that has permanence.

Ruskin, too, seems not to have reproved the sexual love of Troilus and Criseyde as a diary entry of Sunday, June 15, 1883 shows:

> Dreamed of R[ose] that she was still hard and cruel in heart, but that she came to me--and gave herself to me--as sweetly in body as Cressid to Troilus, in Chaucer's verse.[31]

In a lecture on modern art (June 7, 1867) he also attempts (like Chaucer at the end of Troilus) to show that there is a love that lives beyond the grave. Using for illustration a cartoon sketch for tapestry, from Chaucer, of Love bringing

---

[30]He cannot be considered right, however. For sexual love to be given such high honour its object must be for procreation. That of Troilus and Criseyde, up to this point, was not for that purpose.

[31]The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin, p. 353.

in Alcestis (Prologue to The Legende of Goode Women), he took the opportunity of reminding his audience of the "womanly type of the faithfulness and eternity of Love" that she exhibited when she gave up her life for her husband's and is later restored to him from the grave. But in Chaucer the Spirit of Love that leads her is only that of perfect human passion:

> Yclothed was this mighty God of Love
> In silk, enbrouded ful of grene greves,
> In-with a fret of rede rose-leves,
> The fresshest syn the world was first bygonne.
> His gilte heer was corowned with a sonne,
> Instede of gold, . . .
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
>
> And in his hand me thoghte I saugh him holde
> Twoo firy dartes, as the gledes rede,
> And aungelyke hys wynges saugh I sprede.[32]

The painter's projection is different from Chaucer's. He has gone farther into the meaning of the old Greek myth and has given the Spirit of Love that lives beyond the grave--"pilgrim love, which goes forth into another country and to a far distant shrine, and thinks to find no resting place but in heaven"--

> "Love that groweth into faith;
> Love that seeth over death;
> Love that, with his loving eyes,
> Looks on into Paradise."

The mention of "pilgrim love," "another country," "Paradise," "shrine" echoes The Canterbury Tales--pilgrimage to a shrine

---

[32]Prologue to The Legende of Goode Women, F 226-236. This is indicating Chaucer's realistic approach to the question of love which, for him, goes from the sexual to Divine.

in preparation for another world, the entire process embodying love of 'kynde.'

Another cartoon, also from The Legend of Good Women,[33] is used as an illustration of the two wives of Jason --Hypsipyle and Medea. The painter does not present Medea as a cruel and enraged sorceress.[34] Instead, her name means Counsellor, Designer, just what Ruskin expresses in "Of Queen's Garden" to be a woman's role. Hypsipyle is presented as the type of patience and protective gentleness of the affections, having saved her father from the rage of the Lemnian women.[35] This imagery of patience in love is also present in Chaucer and will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Ruskin's interpretation of "Beheste," "Art," and "Patience" in Chaucer's Parlement of Foules is interesting. "Patience," the long-suffering love, "Beheste," the promise of love, and "Art" representing the cunning art of love as Ruskin sees it are of necessity present in every successful home of man. Here in The Parlement "Beheste" and "Art" are, indeed, sitting next to "Patience." In others of Chaucer's work the physical position is not revealed but is nevertheless evident. Certainly in Troilus and Criseyde all three

---

[33]The "Legenda Ypsiphile et Medee, Martiris."

[34]Cf. "Ethics of Dust," The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XVIII, p. 298.

[35]As related by Ovid in the Heroides, Ep. VI. When the other Lemnian women put all their men to death, Hypsipyle spared the life of her father, the King, Thoas.

are present in Troilus's and Pandarus's cunning art in bringing the lovers together, in the patience required and shown by Troilus to wait out the turn of events, and in the promise of faithfulness, secrecy and love service. These very attributes of love are also evident in some of the Canterbury Tales; "The Merchant's" and "The Franklin's," for instance: Damian's and May's cunning is inter-related with May's promise, and their patience in bringing about the ruse, no more or less than Dorigen's promise of fidelity to Arveragus, her rash promise to Aurelius, Aurelius's cunning, and his patience in bringing his plan to a successful end.

Ruskin's gives three interpretations to

> Dame Pacience syttynge there I fond,
> With face pale, upon an hil of sond;
> (242-243)

According to his theory "Pacience" represents "the ghostly sand of the horologe of the world. . . . she is seated there because she is herself the Spirit of Staying, and victor over all things that pass and change; . . . and . . . she is seated on her sand-heap as the only treasure to be gained by human toil. This latter interpretation he hastens to refute as well on his as on Chaucer's part: Chaucer did not mean this, nor does he like to give it this interpretation.

Whatever else the lines mean, he says, does not matter; what is important is that "Beheste" and "Art" are next to "Pacience." Ruskin overlooks the humility implied by the position of "Pacience" "upon an hil of sond" and also her position in relation to 'Pees'--

Byfore the temple-dore ful soberly
Dame Pees sat, with a curtyn in hire hond,
And by hire syde, wonder discretly,
Dame Pacience syttynge there I fond,
With face pale, upon an hil of sond;
And aldernext, withinne and ek withoute,
Byheste and Art, and of here folk a route.
(239-245)

The inter-relation of all these powers is absolutely necessary to sustain all aspects of love. These are recognized in Chaucer's work.

Ruskin recognizes Chaucer as a poet of nature. Partly because of this and partly in regard to his need to explain how the importance of the sea and shipping waned from the classical to the chivalric age when the sea was regarded as a treacherous impediment meriting scorn, compared to the supremacy of the horse, he mentions Chaucer's fondness for woods to which he sends his favourite Canace (of "The Squire's Tale") as Shakespeare sends Rosalind and Silva, and Spenser, Belphoebe. With this fondness for woods (and gardens), Ruskin juxtaposes what he considers Chaucer's repugnance for the ocean, but the two examples he gives to support his claim seem to lack plausibility. According to his assessment, throughout his poems, wherever Chaucer exhibits enthusiasm, it is on a sunny day in the "good greenwood" but the slightest approach to the seashore makes him quiver. He supports this with Dorigen's behaviour and expression as she awaits her husband's return in a castle by the sea, and by what he sees as Chaucer's lack of sensation and description of anything that happened to Constance in her five

years vicissitudes on the ocean.

But Dorigen's expressions seem not to be directed to the sea but to the "grisly feendly rokkes blake" and also to a "wys God . . . [who] han . . . wroght this werk unresonable." This passage quoted by Ruskin does not seem to support his point--

> Another tyme ther wolde she sitte and thynke,
> And caste hir eyen downward from the brynke.
> And whan she saugh the grisly rokkes blake,
> For verray feere so wolde hir herte quake
> That on hire feet she myghte hire noght sustene.
> Thanne wolde she sitte adoun upon the greene,
> And pitously into the see biholde,
> And seyn right thus, with sorweful sikes colde:
> "Eterne God, that thurgh thy purveiaunce
> Ledest the world by certein governaunce,
> In ydel, as men seyn, ye no thyng make.
> But, Lord, thise grisly feendly rokkes blake,
> That semen rather a foul confusion
> Of werk than any fair creacion
> Of swich a parfit wys God and a stable,
> Why han ye wroght this werk unresonable?
> ("The Franklin's Tale," ll. 857-872)

In claiming that in all Constance's travels up and down the ocean Chaucer does not utter a single word of description of the sea or express any emotion about it or about the ship, Ruskin seems to be overlooking Chaucer's purpose--a portrayal of the forces of evil versus good on the journey of life (a macrocosmic significance), and the sea as only a symbol of one of the instruments used (as Walter is used as an instrument to buffet the good Griselda). On the other hand, if taken literally, Ruskin might consider the sea as having been helpful to Constance: it destroyed her attacker ("The Man of Law's Tale," ll. 913-923), and in all her years of travel, she did not "in the salte see" die

as Alla was to discover (1039).

Other evidences of Ruskin's interest in, and admiration for Chaucer are seen in his letter from school to his father (Thursday, March 21, 1861) requesting that his "big Chaucer" be sent down by book-post; another to Mrs. Margaret Bell (February 12, 1863) tells that among other things, he is reading Chaucer. He seems even to have been a promoter of Chaucer as two letters to him from Susan Beever will support. In the first she thanks him for lending Chaucer to her; in the second, she expresses her admiration: it is so quaint, has such original ideas, and she admires his physical appearance.[36]

Ruskin's own admiration was recognized by his friends: A letter from Burne-Jones and others in Winnington (September 5, 1863), informed him of their plan to design for a suggested English house for him, a set of wall hangings, which the children would embroider with figures from Chaucer. Again, Ruskin's response shows his great love for anything Chaucerian: ". . . And--for the tapestry, please begin that directly; that at least I can live with; and let it be as you say,--Chaucer's Legend. I should like that better than any--any--anything, . . . I would not have had any other if I had chosen. And it will be very wonderful and helpful and holy to me." The reply of Burne-Jones to this acceptance gives details of the tapestry: Significantly

[36]The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin, pp. 398,400.

it incorporates a scene from The Legend of Good Women (a work that Ruskin refers to in his writings) with "Chaucer looking very frightened according to the poem . . . then comes Love, a little angry, bringing Alcestis. . . ."[37]

These expressions are signs of enthusiasm and of the great impact of Chaucer on Ruskin and his circle. Ruskin evaluates Chaucer's genius, subjects, morals, style, honesty, beauty, humour and the purity of his language and finds much that is praiseworthy. His seeming rejection of The Canterbury Tales stems perhaps from his strict evangelicalism, but after his counter-conversion in Turin, his loss of evangelical faith and gain of aesthetic-moral faith in a new critical mood, he was able to conform to that "beauty pure and wild" as increasingly impresses the critic. From here on, he is able to accept such beauty as Chaucer embodies, without Arnold's misgivings, and allow for such a use of Chaucer's medievalism as the Pre-Raphaelites, especially Morris, make. For him Chaucer is in the highest rank of poets.

---

[37]The Winnington Letters of John Ruskin, ed. Van Akin Burd (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), pp. 427-428.

# CONCLUSION

Let us consider now the composite image of Chaucer as perceived by Victorians. In general he was seen more positively now than in any other period exclusive of his own because of the increased enthusiasm about the idea of the man, the "father figure" of an age which seems so similar to theirs and yet so unlike it. There was intense interest in his matter as well as his manner.[1] Whatever of adverse criticism there is in this period is confined chiefly to the earlier part before Chaucerian scholarship opened the way to a fuller understanding of the man and his work, and is made by people motivated by some kind of bias, ethical or literary.[2] As the period progresses and some of the difficulties in language and metre are resolved by the results of Chaucerian studies, he comes to be understood more; the re-evaluation of his language and metre, his moral tone and aspects of his style--diction, humour, character portrayal--presents him as a poet who ranks with the world's greatest.

---

[1]They do not agree with, for instance, the seventeenth-century Brathwait, that the substance of what Chaucer says is so good that the manner of saying it matters comparatively little. Matthew Arnold, for example, while testifying to his truth of substance and virtue of style and manner yet rejects certain aspects of his manner.

[2]Arnold's criticism of Chaucer's language and diction, Ruskin's disapproval of The Canterbury Tales, Swinburn's attack on his foreign borrowings are clear cases of literary and ethical bias.

In this study Arnold emerges as the chief critic of Chaucer's language and diction, rating unfavourably his antique dialect, his metrics and his diction.[3] Arnold seems to reflect some common ideas on Chaucer's mode of expression as undignified and unworthy of great poets (unlike Ruskin who sees this as contributing to Chaucer's greatness, and unlike Robert Vaughan who sees Chaucer commanding the attention of even Clerk, Monk, Prioress and Nun when he portrays grossness side by side with simple faith) and thus he condemns in part both Chaucer's style and his matter. By implication, he impugns the man himself because he believes that style is inevitably the expression of the poet's character as the poet's matter is the expression of his mind.

Arnold's criticism of Chaucer's metrics pales in the light of John Payne Collier's, Edward Bulwer's (Lord Lytton), George Lillie Craik's, Elizabeth Browning's, and Francis Child's defence.[4] Collier is in accord with Mrs. Browning

---

[3]But as John Drinkwater points out, "good diction in poetry . . . should derive from the common speech of the time and yet be a heightened form of that speech, achieving from the emotional pressure of poetry, a new dignity and beauty." One agrees with him that Chaucer in taking English speech and for the first time making it the language of English literature was dealing with a language unsophisticated, unlearned, and quite ingenious in its sincerity; that Chaucer achieves a clarity which was the chief idiomatic characteristic of the common speech of the time; that the notable triumph of his work was that he took the simplicity common around him and transformed it into the finer essence of simplicity which is purity (<u>Victorian Poetry</u> [New York: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1966, 1924], pp. 35-37). Concurring, we might also conclude that Chaucer merits more than Arnold is willing to credit him with.

[4]Arnold finds Chaucer's use of the ten-syllable cou-

when he claims first place for Chaucer in the introduction of classical measures into the English language, citing the beginning of his prose version of Boethius with two hexameter lines . . .

> Alas, I wepying am constrayned to begin verse
> of sorrowful mater,
> That whilom in flourisshyng studye made
> delytable verses.[5]

Edward Bulwer in recognizing his accuracy of rhythm finds as few lines with a defective foot as in Dryden, finds his metre extremely artful--achieving music by a stop at the end of a couplet, and his pause at the end of a line.[6] Craik shows both by old tradition and by the evidence of the changes in the language that Chaucer was a metrist, and the introducer of the iambic metre into English. Comparing him to Surrey, he finds Chaucer as regular in both syllabic and accented metre; in fact, he concludes, "[Surrey] merely restored the art that had been lost since Chaucer."[7] In ascribing to Chaucer the title of "great poet" Craik names him "the Homer

---

plet inadequate for poetry of a very high pitch, though he admits he uses it admirably for story-telling that is not of the epic pitch (Essays in Criticism [London and Cambridge: Macmillan and Company, 1865], p. 83).

[5]A Bibliographical and Critical Account of the Rarest Books in the English Language (London: J. Lilly, 1865), 2 Vols., p. xli.

[6]"Letter to his Son" The Life of Edward Bulwer by his Grandson (London: K. Paul, Trench and Company, 1913, 1883), 2 Vols., Vol. ii, pp. 419-420.

[7]Craik and Charles Macfarlane, The Pictorial History of England (London: C. Knight, 1841, 1838), 4 Vols., Vol. ii, p. 839.

of his country,"[8] a view shared by Mrs. Browning.

We see also Arnold's criticism of Chaucer's language disputed by Child, Landor, Clough among others. But Arnold's praise of the great master refutes his own adverse criticism even more than any condemnation by others.

The second major Victorian critic of Chaucer--Algernon Charles Swinburne--overlooks the medieval power of 'translatio' embraced so extraordinarily by Chaucer. It has been said that Chaucer invented scarcely anything; but what is important is what he was able to do with what he found in the work of others.[9] Shakespeare, too, shares this uninventive quality, yet seems to emerge supreme in the judgment of Swinburne (and others) when compared with Chaucer. We see Swinburne's criticism of what he considers Chaucer's extraordinary borrowing defended not only by Landor and Clough but also by lesser writers who attest to the significance of the so-called borrowings. The decadence of Anglo-Saxon as a written language after the Norman Conquest, becoming only "a dialect of slaves, the patois of a crushed

---

[8] A Compendious History of English Literature and of the English Language from the Norman Conquest (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1897, 1885), 2 Vols., Vol. 1, pp. 247-272.

[9] An unnamed Reviewer of The Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer observes that "[Chaucer] cares not at all for the praise of originality or invention . . . he cares for nothing but his story. Hence he is quite content to become a translator if he has seen a good story in a foreign tongue (The London Review, July, 1859, Vol. XII, p. 293). Another notes that he was no weak nor lazy copyist; he takes nothing at second hand.

and despised race" is observed.[10] That Chaucer could have raised that language, "unfit and an insufficient medium for his or others utterances," create at times the very language to clothe the forms and conceptions he conceived, bespeaks the accomplishment only of a genius. But how much borrowing was really involved? Not much, according to George Perkin Marsh: nine percent of continental origin in "The Squire's Tale," seven percent in "The Nun's Priest's," and eleven percent in "The Parson's," a large share of which were forced upon him by the necessities of rhyme.[11]

It is interesting and significant to note that in the works of other writers of the time it was the Anglo-Saxon words that became obsolete, while Chaucer's greater proportion of French made his work easier read.[12] Saxon and Norman races having become fused, it was indeed of the utmost importance that a language accessible to the mixture be found, and Chaucer created such a language. The necessary introduction of French words by Chaucer has given English

---

[10] M. P. Case, "Chaucer and his Times," Bibliotheca Sacra, Andover, Mass., April 1854, Art. viii, second series, Vol. XI, pp. 394-416. Latin was the language of the learned, French of the higher classes, and Saxon of the common people. The deterioration of this last left the common man without a language with which he could communicate effectively. It is this gap that Chaucer sought to fill.

[11] Lectures on the English Language (New York: C. Scribner, 1860), p. 169. See also his comments in chapter iv of this study.

[12] Thomas Wright, Essays on Archaeological Subjects (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880), 2 Vols., Vol. ii, p. 57).

an abundance and variety possessed perhaps by no other language.[13] Howbeit, while not all will agree on the high service to English language and literature provided by the extraordinary borrowings of which Swinburne accuses Chaucer, the supportive statements of Landor, Clough, Marsh, Thomas Wright, Richard Green and others should aid in obliterating the harsh judgment of Swinburne and let stand the view of Chaucer as the great innovator of the English language and poet of original power as he has come to be recognzied.[14] Other Victorians like William Rossetti, Clough, and Mrs. Browning recognize the achievement observed by Drinkwater

---

[13]Henry Hallam, Introduction to the Literature of Europe (London: J. Murray, 1872, 1860, 1847, 1837-39), 4 Vols., Vol. i, p. 170.

[14]John O'Hagen thinks Chaucer's language ill deserves such praise. He notes that Chaucer's language having very soon become obsolete, he never could nor can be a popular favourite. His coarseness is inexcusable and also dramatically inarticulate ("Chaucer" The Afternoon Lectures on Literature and Art, delivered in the Theatre of the Museum of Industry [St. Stephen's Green, DUblin, 1863-1869], 5 series, series ii, 1864, pp. 247-277).

The Westminster Review, July, 1866, quotes an unnamed writer: "But it is not likely that all Chaucer's writings--consisting, as they mostly do, of translations--can ever become popular. We still require an edition of the "Canterbury Tales" in which the obsolete words, opinions and customs will be explained, and the obsolete pronunciation indicated" (Vol. XXX, p. 199).

Chaucer himself had expressed apprehension at the prospect of his verses being preserved as he wrote them (Troilus, V, 1793-96). We see efforts to modernize, Latinize, etc., but in the end from the late Victorian period with the Chaucer Society, effort is made to go back to the original or as near the original as possible, to find manuscripts of Chaucer's own hand, or those corrected by him; there is Child's effort at scansion to read as Chaucer read, the resolution of the silent e, and even today's effort in Universities to learn to read Chaucer as Chaucer read his works to get just the right meaning.

and praise it,[15] ranking Chaucer with Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, the world's greatest poets. Those who assign him second place to Dante fail to see their common religious concern. While Dante views life as the passage of the soul from a state of nature to a state of grace, Chaucer views it as a happy pilgrimage, himself delighting in the varieties of the costume and the characters.[16] Arnold, who apparently considers Chaucer's work immoral and not on par with Dante's, and Fitzgerald who commends only "The Clerk's," "The Pardoner's," "The Knight's," and "The Squire's" tales to George Crabbe, might have been directed to the incidental morals in "The Pardoner's," "The Summoner's," and "The Clerk's" tales, and see Chaucer's main idea --the conduct of life--which in essence is extended to lead to Dante's main idea--the saving of the soul (Chaucer's approach is in no way less concerned with salvation except that life in this world goes on naturally while seeking the eternal bliss).

Some Victorians can find Shakespearean qualities in Chaucer, but even accepting Landor's and Clough's opinions that Chaucer was a pioneer for many of Shakespeare's ideas, they assign him a secondary place in relation to the Bard.

---

[15]Cf. note 3 above with the views of these writers in chapter 1.

[16]James Russell Lowell, "Chaucer" North American Review, July, 1870, Vol. CXI, pp. 155-198. Reprinted in My Study Window The Complete Writings of James Russell Lowell. Riverside Edition, 1871; also New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1956, 16 Vols, Vol. ii.

Fitzgerald, not surprisingly, since he is not a Chaucer enthusiast, ranks him with Shakespeare in humour, sympathy and activity of life but has other reservations: Chaucer has not sounded the depths of thought and feeling recognized in Shakespeare. William Butler Yeats likens him to Shakespeare in his revelatory rather than reformatory aim, watching the procession of the world with sympathy for men as they are, and refusing to make his poetry a vehicle of moral indignation and reform.[17]

Although not considered a dramatist,[18] Chaucer is ranked with Shakespeare for skill in characterization. According to John Wesley Hales, only the 'theatre' of Shakespeare attempts with a success in any way comparable to the astonishing task which Chaucer sets himself: "He attempts to portray the entire society of his age from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot--from the knight, the topmost figure of medieval life, down to the ploughman and the cook; and the result is a gallery of life-like portraits, which has no parallel anywhere, with one exception, for variety, truthfulness, humanity."[19] William Rossetti echoes

---

[17] Ideas of Good and Evil (London: Macmillan, 1924), pp. 125-126.

[18] But he is in some respects a dramatist like Shakespeare. Marsh recognizes him as essentially a dramatist, and states that if his great work does not appear in the conventional dramatic form, it is an accident of the time (Origin and History of the English Language, p. 419).

[19] "Chaucer and Shakespeare" the Quarterly Review, January, 1873, Vol. CXXXIV, pp. 225-255; Notes and Essays on Shakespeare, 1884, pp. 56-104.

similar sentiments as he likens Chaucer to the great political observer of men who in every age is born to record and eternize its acts. . . . Chaucer makes every one of his characters perfect in his time, every one is an antique statue--the image of a class, and not of an imperfect individual.[20]

More than once the success of his craft has been likened to military success: by Morris in The Life and Death of Jason when he compares Criseyde's response to Troilus' military victory (as she watches him from her window) to that of the English people on the return of the victorious soldiers from the battle-field in France (Book XVII, ll. 19-24); by Macaulay who compares Chaucer's creation of a copious and forcible language by the infusion of French and German into the Saxon to the success of the Black Prince in battle;[21] and Alexander Smith who finds Chaucer's shrewdness, conciseness, his ever-present humour, his frequent irony, and his short homely line which strikes the reader most, effective as the play of his short Roman sword which he used as a soldier in battle.[22]

Some place him below Milton, Shelley, Wordsworth, Keats, and Spenser. Still, in the final analysis, only Shakespeare seems to rival him for first place in the

---

[20]Lives of Famous Poets, p. 15.

[21]Thomas Babingtom Macaulay, History of England (London: Longman, Brown, 1849-61), 5 Vols, Vol. i, pp. 20, 342.

[22]"William Dunbar" Dreamthorp, 1863, p. 70.

general Victorian assessment.

Chaucer's matter receives less criticism than his manner, perhaps because of the attractiveness of his subjects to many poets, and also their contemporary importance; thus the subjects of women, love, nature, and poetry have been surveyed by Victorians whether in imitation of Chaucer --to air parallel or contrasting views--or the suitability and attractiveness of the topics to individual Victorian artists. Chaucer's attraction to the singing birds, the floral and fresh spring and even human nature[23] have been carried over to the Victorian era, but even more important to Victorians is the subject of women, possibly because of the controversy about their role, which seems to have been undergoing change from Chaucer's Wife of Bath to Tennyson's Princess Ida.[24]

Love, sex, and marriage (counterparts of the subject) were viewed from differing perspectives: Chaucer's concept of marriage according to Biblical injunction, and sex as a natural life process not to be inhibited, are in contrast with the view of those Victorians who later came to see

---

[23]Due to the presence of all aspects of Nature in his work, he has been considered a nature poet by writers and critics throughout the centuries. Moreover, his study and understanding of human nature have given to his poetry the reality that is applauded by most critics.

[24]Chaucer seems to have been the forerunner of certain types of women created by some Victorians: Tennyson's Princess Ida, Meredith's Fair Women in Revolt, Swinburne's Atalanta, seem but replicas of chaucer's Wife of Bath.

marriage as sometimes a slave state,[25] as "an institution and an experience to be analysed, questioned, perhaps redefined, and an idea that has deep social as well as symbolic implications.[26]

While love for Chaucer seems to have been based on physical beauty--Emilie, Alisoun, Criseyde, Canace, White--and womanly virtues--Constance, Griselda--for the Victorians it was based also on money and property as exemplified in Tennyson's "Locksley Hall," Hardy's The Mayor of Casterbridge, Meredith's The Egoist and Diana of the Crossways, George Eliot's Middlemarch. Sexual love took on various meanings for different writers and as in the works of Chaucer, in the Troilus for example, moves from fleshly animal love for gratification in some writers to sacramental and Divine in such writers as Swinburne, Meredith, Patmore, and Dante Rossetti.

---

[25]Professor Johnson refers to Carlyle's view of this in the "Nigger Question" where "Carlyle makes an exact parallel between marriage and slavery--leaving little doubt as to which sex is slave and which master--in the process of extolling slavery as a necessary institution" (Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry, p. 107, note 60). And the speaker in "A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt" considers the woman who is obliged to use her beauty as she herself is used (as many are sometimes obliged to do) is in reality "a poor slave" though she seems to walk "in union" by a husband's side. She considers the wrong done to women by subjugating them to man's will not a thing of the past, but still present around them in the Victorian period, and expresses the view that women "are somewhat tired of Eden" ''Tis good for men to halve, think we' (Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry, p. 48).

[26]Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry, p. 38.

Chaucer had not the problems Victorians had in dealing with sex. For him, sexual activity knew no bound: Clergy and nobles were as lecherous as the common people and he expresses their actions bluntly thus bringing on himself the apparent charge of being lax from Arnold, licentiousness from Fitzgerald, wantonness and voluptuousness from Cardinal Wiseman, and the disapproval of *The Canterbury Tales* from Ruskin. But there was no more lechery in his day than in the Victorian era; for many Victorians, however, the subject was to be handled more delicately or was tabooed. The awareness of the natural state of sex, however, and its illicit practice by even some of the artists became so overwhelmingly apparent that some were compelled to write about some aspects of it--Mill in *The Subjection of Women*, Thackeray in *Vanity Fair*, Dickens in *Bleak House*, George Eliot in *Middlemarch*. Late Victorians of the seventies and eighties took up the subject with surprising frankness.

Critics are concerned not only with Chaucer the poet, but also with Chaucer the man. As Furnivall points out, Stow, Tyrwhitt, Bradshaw, Ten Brink all act as a guide to the reader to help him to see Chaucer, not only outwardly as he was in the flesh--page, soldier, squire, diplomat, custom-house officer, Member of Parliament--but inwardly as he was in the spirit--gentle and loving, sharing the sorrows of others, and by comforting them, losing part of his own, yet long dwelling on the sadness of forsaken love, seeking the "Consolation of Philosophy," studying books and women's

nature, viewing the beauties of the world around him, listening to the "heavenly harmony" of birds' song; becoming the most genial and humourous healthy-souled man that England had ever seen.[27] Frederick Denison Maurice sees him as essentially the English citizen, the link between the literature of Court and Commons, with wide appreciation of English life.[28] William Morris speaks of him as the Gentleman, Chaucer,[29] and Swinburne tells of his excess of pity for the men and women living under the law, tramelled in soul or body.[30] Others note his love of Nature and his study of human nature, all of which redound to the success of his craft. He is possessed of thoughts that dissolve in tenderness; he touches the more hidden springs of the heart, and he shares some of that "gentillesse" and "bounty" of which he so liked to speak. His humour and irony are not only excellencies of his craft, but attributes of the man.

In general, the Victorians' perception of Chaucer is positive because they understand more of the man, more about what he wrote: his language, and the purpose for which he wrote; and the Chaucer Society is said to be the culminating

---

[27]"Recent Work at Chaucer," p. 389.

[28]_On the Representation and Education of the People_ (London and New York, 1866), p. 58.

[29]"Signs of Change" _The Collected Works of William Morris_, Vol. XXIII, p. 51.

[30]_William Blake: A Critical Essay_ (London: J. C. Hotten, 1868), p. 152; also Ed. Hugh J. Luke (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970).

factor in aiding their understanding and appreciation of the artist. To be sure, there were differences of opinion even on the points on which he was praised and particularly marked in his rating with other writers. Though his position as "first poet" has never been challenged,[31] Victorians were anything but unified in their impressions of the great man and poet; no two seem to agree in totum in their evaluation of the great artist, on his position in relation to such literary giants as Dante, Homer, Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, apparently because he possessed the virtues of all of them--Shakespeare's dramatic quality and genius, Dante's perception of the "human comedia" with its spiritual touch, Homer's metrical ability, Spenser's rhyme and sound effects, and Milton's power and grand style.[32] Even while agreeing on his great mastery at characterization, his humour, his ability to portray the world in its past, present and future state, his narrative skill and theatrical bent, his other-

---

[31]One stops short, however, at Thomas Carlyle's statement--"Thinkest thou there were no poets till Dan Chaucer? No heart burning with a thought, which it could not hold, and had no word for; and needed to shape and coin a word for,--what thou callest a metaphor, trope or the like? For every word we have there was such a man and poet (Past and Present [Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965], p. 131).

[32]Arnold would refute the idea of Chaucer's ever writing in the "grand style," but many of his lines attest to this--

"O tendre, o dere, o yonge children myne"
("The Clerk's Tale")
"So longe he seyled in the salte se"
("The Man of Law's Tale")

But Arnold must understand Chaucer's pronunciation and his prosody to appreciate them.

wordly considerations while keeping to this world's reality, some still could not overlook minor inadequacies, or overcome their own bias. Englishman though he was to the core, English citizen, he was accused of Italianizing, Gallicizing, of catering to the tastes of churls, his accusers unmindful of the advantages that such were to English literature and the development of the English mind.[33] Compared with Homer, he was, to some, metrically weaker; he was less profound than Shakespeare; he was lacking in Dante's high seriousness and original power, Marlowe's and Wordsworth's sublimity, the beauty of Keats, and Milton's grand style.

Yet Chaucer's fame is now firmly established, much thanks to the Victorians. Arnold's praise outweighs his blame. Swinburne's worst criticism can hardly stand in the light of the advantage to the synthesizing of nations and national literature accomplished by the very facet of Chaucer's work he criticized. Fitzgerald, despite his apparent scorn of the great master, recommends him in the next breath. Ruskin read him more than he did any other author despite his reservations on The Canterbury Tales and refers to him one-hundred-and-eight times in his works. Chaucer is imitated by the greatest of the Victorians, Tennyson, Browning, Morris, and he is greatly praised by Elizabeth

---

[33]By mingling words of Provencal fancy, and some of French and of Latin growth with the native coarseness of the English, Chaucer had banished the superannuated and the uncouth, and softened the churlish nature of the hard Anglo-Saxon. This is apparently overlooked by Swinburne.

Barrett Browning, Landor, Clough. It was left for the late Victorians to rank him among the immortals and this they did partly through the agency of the Chaucer Society. One may fairly claim for the Chaucer Society as Furnivall remarks, the credit of having, with Bradshaw and Ten Brink's help, done the best work at and for Chaucer that has been done since his death: that work explains the secret of his early life, clears his memory from the reproach of having written much that is unworthy, lays the foundation for a fitting edition of the poet, and enables the modern English ear better to appreciate Chaucer's music, and modern English eye to see into the vibrant soul of the poet.[34]

It cannot then be denied that it is with the Victorians that the establishing of Chaucer's reputation was accom-

---

[34]Writers had been complaining about the neglect of Chaucer by English Authors. The Gentleman's Magazine reports the view of one writer that "the neglect which Chaucer has experienced, arises, perhaps in great measure from the failings of his editors [on the loss of final e, destroying the secret of Chaucer's metre], and the failure of the early printers, except Caxton, to adhere to the MSS" (New Series, Vol. V, pp. 501, 502; Vol. VI, pp. 44-48).

Another considers it a national reproach that after the lapse of nearly five-hundred years we are still without a critical and illustrative edition of Chaucer's Poetical works (Thomas Spencer Baynes, "The Text of Chaucer" Edinburgh Review, July 1, 1870, Vol. cxxxii, pp. 1-2, 7), and Furnivall asks, "When will our Victorian time love and honour him as it should?" "A thousand Englishmen out of every thousand and one are content to pass by with a shrug and a sneer." "Of all our poets he is the one to come home to us most."

It is hoped that the appeal of the Chaucer Society will erase these and Alexander Smith's complaint that though Chaucer is admitted to be a great poet by the general public, he is not frequently read. He is like a cardinal virtue talked about, praised, admired, but very seldom practised ("Geoffrey Chaucer" The Museum, January, 1862, Vol. 1, p. 459).

plished. Neither the modernization of the eighteenth century, nor that of Wordsworth in the early nineteenth, nor yet the Latinzing of Kynaston and King accomplished what Victorians achieved by solving the problem of the final _e_,[35] thus bringing Chaucer's metrics out of disrepute, by comparing his metric and rhyme with that of the Greeks, by evaluating his humour as a medium of expressing reality, and his comedy as an expression of human life; and the Chaucer Society's contribution in encouraging and bringing the work of scholars to the forefront. Moreover, he was Classicized by Mrs. Browning and others, taking his place beside Homer as Chaucer himself had desired (although some deny him that place, even Furnivall, despite his praise of, and work on behalf of, Chaucer). Still after five-hundred years he is seen to be bright and fresh as the May he so much loved, as second only to Shakespeare in England, and fourth only to Dante and Homer in the world. Chaucer continues to be read with interest and will be "so long as a love for nature and truth shall remain among those who speak the English language," one writer says. In 1880 Arnold, referring to

---

[35]At the same time they were aware that the final _e_ though often sounded is sometimes mute; that Chaucer makes at his pleasure words long or short, dissyllabic or trisyllabic, as he himself tells us--

> 'But for the rime is light and lewde,
> Yet make it somewhat agreable,
> Though some verse fail in a syllable."

It is evident that Chaucer trusted his cadences to his ear, and his verse is therefore usually rhythmical, and accidentally metrical.

Chaucer as "a genuine source of joy and strength, which is flowing still for us and will flow always" also predicts that he "will be read, as time goes on, far more generally than he is read now." His prediction is fulfilled: Chaucer now holds a place among his compeers in the 'House of Fame.'

# APPENDIX

## CHAUCER AND TENNYSON: MARRIAGE AND THE ROLES OF WOMEN

Chaucer does not consistently condemn infidelity as Tennyson does. Seeming not to consider any relationship in marriage as ideal, he is bent on presenting to his audience a real world; thus May's, Alisoun's, the Shipman's wife's adultery do not end in separation of husband and wife. Tennyson on the other hand writes from a modern perspective where an adulterous wife is indicted, and separation or divorce are alternatives. Tennyson's apparent "distaste for the physical, sexual reality involved in the marriage bond--distaste for what is unideally of the earth, distaste often focussed on the fleshliness of women" in his middle and later periods,[1] is nowhere present in Chaucer who writes on sexual activity as easily and unabashed as he would on any other subject. With Chaucer, even adultery seems to be excused as a natural process;[2] and premarital sex becomes a

---

[1]Wendell Stacy Johnson, Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry, p. 113.

[2]Even modern acceptable reasons for permanent separation, cruelty for example, are not contemplated. Griselda, unaware of Walter's real intention refuses to give up her claim as Walter's wife even while obeying his command to return to her father's house where she will remain "clene in

young man's sport as it appears in "The Miller's" and "The Reeve's" tales.

Yet for Tennyson as for Chaucer before him there is place in marriage for "trouthe" as well as for commercial contract. Both poets share similar, but more often contrasting, views on these. Dorigen, supported by her husband, is the epitome of "trouthe" in Chaucer, but his Griselda and Tennyson's Isabel can be said to share this quality also.

> Reveréd Isabel, the crown and head,
> The stately flower of female fortitude
> Of perfect wifehood and pure lowlihead

seems to echo, if not the words, the very spirit of Griselda.

> The intuitive decision of a bright
> And thorough-edgèd intellect to part
>     Error from crime; a prudence to withhold;
>     The laws of marriage charactered in gold
>     Upon the blanchèd tablets of her heart;
> A love still burning upward, giving light
> To read those laws; an accent very low
> In blandishment, but a most silver flow
>     Of subtle-paced counsel in distress,
> Right to the heart and brain, though undescried,
>     Winning its way with extreme gentleness
> Through all the outworks of suspicious pride;
> A courage to endure and to obey;
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
>
> Crowned Isabel, through all her placid life,
> The queen of marriage, a most perfect wife
>     ("Isabel" ll. 13-28)

seems the very counterpart of Griselda who, in her very awareness of the laws of marriage according to medieval

---

body, herte, and al."

> For sith I yaf to yow my maydenhede
> And am youre trewe wyf, it is no drede,
> God shilde swich a lordes wyf to take
> Another man to housbonde or to make!
>     (E 836-840)

standards, written as it were on the tablets of her heart, sees no room for rancour even at Walter's apparent cruelty: she loved, she endured, she obeyed as is implicit in her promise; considered herself Walter's wife still--a truly perfect 'wyf' according to the marriage law she was following.

Tennyson has shown his disdain for commercializing of sex in the poems marked by "marriage-hindering Mammon." His "Locksley Hall," "Edwin Morris," "Aylmer's Field," "The Flight," and "Maud" all have tinges of commercial contract which he calls "social lies that warp us from the living truth."

> Cursèd be the social lies, that warp us from
> the living truth.
> Cursèd be the sickly forms that err from
> honest Nature's rule!
> Cursèd be the gold that gilds the straitened
> forehead of the fool!
> ("Locksley Hall," ll. 60-62)

He sees it even as a national issue, and himself as not knowing how to handle it:

> Every gate is thronged with suitors, all
> the markets overflow.
> I have but an angry fancy: what is that
> which I should do?
> . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
>
> But the jangling of the guinea helps
> the hurt that Homer feels,
> And the nations do but murmur, snarling
> at each other's heels.
> ("Locksley Hall," 101-106)

Chaucer's attitude is different. His modern aspect of commercialization of sex--the Wife of Bath, the Shipman's Wife --is not condemned while Tennyson's Amy of "Locksley Hall" is.

Tennyson's Princess shares the Wife of Bath's view in her revolt against the contemporary role of women, but here the similarity with Chaucer ends. Tennyson in "The Princess" differs from Chaucer on that "obedience or faithfulness unto death" to which medieval women and some of Chaucer's in particular were subjected. Although the Princess like the Wife is in revolt against her status as a wife, Tennyson questions the relationship between a man and his wife--"whether marriage is a contract between a master and his natural inferior or a relationship of equals."[3] Of the three conceptions of women in the Victorian period,[4] Tennyson seems to favour that which makes the woman a complement for the man as he indicates in "The Princess":

> . . . seeing either sex alone
> Is half itself, and in true marriage lies
> Nor equal, nor unequal: each fulfils
> Defect in each, . . . (VII. 283-286)

---

[3]Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry, p. 125. Chaucer's Walter and Griselda, on the surface, seem to have had just such a contract as would answer the first part of the question; but during the course of the marriage Griselda, in spite of all her Jobian fortitude, was to remind Walter that she is his wife, however unworthy of the position:

> Remembre yow, myn owene lord so deere,
> I was youre wyf, though I unworthy weere (881-882)

[4](a) The authoritative view where the wife is wholly in subjection to the husband, and her character and her life considered completely distinct from his.

(b) Consideration for equality espoused by such writers as John Stuart Mill and exemplified in the revolt of Princess Ida against her legal and social bondage.

(c) A middle position in which the sexes are considered complementary to each other.

In this he seems to differ from Chaucer, whose writings indicate an agreement with the Victorians' first conception of women: her sole reason for existence as a submissive wife whose whole duty was to love, honour, and obey her lord and master, to manage his household and bring up his children.[5] This theme runs through the first section of "The Merchant's Tale" in his decision to take a wife, and seems to have been Walter's intent also.

There is yet another view of Tennyson's which seems in stark contrast to Chaucer: Chaucer virtually never speaks evil of women.[6] Tennyson on the other hand seems at

---

[5]The wife's character and life were to be completely distinct from the husband's as expressed in the following lines, against which idea the Princess seems to be revolting--

> Man for the field and woman for the hearth:
> Man for the sword and for the needle she:
> Man with the head and woman with the heart:
> Man to command and woman to obey;
> All else confusion ("The Princess" V. 437-441)

This is a medieval view and is exemplified in Chaucer's Griselda, notwithstanding the greater theological meaning. It is also perceived in Dorigen who must remain at home while Arveragus seeks fame abroad; and also in Alisoun and the Shipman's wife who, too, must stay at home while their husbands transact business away from home. The Wife of Bath is the only one of Chaucer's women to violate this concept. In this she anticiaptes the view expressed by Tennyson's Princess Ida as she revolts against her legal and social bondage and demands equal rights. The Princess did not go as far as the Wife who would have nothing short of sovereignty for wives.

[6]Criseyde is the only woman of whom it is felt Chaucer speaks ill. For that, it is said in his own Prologue to The Legend of Good Women that he deserves the anger of the god of Love when he tried to draw near to the daisy.

times to associate the decay of society with women, reminding us of the old medieval view of the culpability of Eve. This he expresses in Vivian and Quenevere of The Idylls of the King and elsewhere,[7] and is one reason that until he read Chaucer's version of Cleopatra he saw images of a tyranized and corrupted Egypt and Egyptian women, lust,

---

> I, knelyng by this flour, in good entente,
> Abood to knowen what this peple mente,
> As stille as any ston; til at the laste
> This god of Love on me hys eyen caste,
> And seyde, "Who kneleth there?" and I answerde
> Unto his askynge, whan that I it herde,
> And seyde, "Sir, it am I," and com him ner,
> And salwed him. Quod he, "What dostow her
> So nygh myn oune floure, so boldely?
> Yt were better worthy, trewely,
> A worm to neghen ner my flour than thow."
> "And why, sire," quod I, "and yt lyke yow?"
> "For thow," quod he, "art thereto nothing able."
> (F 308-320)

Ruskin notes that Chaucer felt his conscience pricked for speaking evil of Criseyde (The Works of John Ruskin, Vol. XXVII, p. 406), but Chaucer in fact did not speak evil of Criseyde. Instead, he seems always to give compromising reasons for her actions. It was left to Henryson to pronounce her a wanton, deserving of the leper she became.

[7]Kate Millet tells us that throughout Tennyson's poetic career, he appears to have been torn between a vivid appreciation of the good women of chivalrous sentiment (the buxom matron or virginal adolescent) and the fatal woman; that he categorized them under the period's elaborate and conventional floral imagery of Lily and Rose. His early lyrics describe as Lilies the fortune of imprisoned highborn maidens--full of sensibility and melting with sexual frustration. In The Idylls of the King, in contrast to this pure but inhibited imagery, Tennyson creates the subversive sexuality of Quenevere and the carnality of Vivian (in the image of the Rose), both of which destroy Arthur's kingdom and Tennyson's ideal state (Sexual Politics [New York: Doubleday, 1970], p. 48). The symbols of Lily and Rose are well chosen--the one, exemplified in the maidens, depicting strength, virtue, life; the other, exhibited by Quenevere and Vivian, portraying less stamina, and subject to decay.

corruption and death fully explicit in Cleopatra. Nowhere in Chaucer are prototypes of Quenevere and Vivian evident, or the association of the decay of society with women. The nearest approximation is the Wife of Bath who defies the old order, attacks the base of feudal society and the theological plan by rejecting the place assigned her in her demand for sovereignty of wives; but she is nothing like Vivian and Quenevere. In spite of her great attraction to the "flesh pot" she is never guilty of adultery. The worst that can be said of her in this regard is her gazing at a future husband at the funeral of her most recent one. The weakness of Criseyde can be explained as Chaucer endeavoured to do: she was not a wife at the time of her involvement with either Troilus or Diomede, nor had she that security enjoyed by Quenevere; thus her giving way to her suitors might be interpreted as a weak, lonely woman in search of security. Such is indicated in her consent to both Troilus and Diomede; and Chaucer in speaking of her spared her reputation "for very routhe."

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arnold, Matthew. Essays in Criticism. London and Cambridge: Macmillan and Co., 1865.

________. Essays in Criticism. Second Series. Ed. S. R. Littlewood. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1960.

________. The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough. Ed. Howard Foster Lowry. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1932.

Ball, A. H. R. Ruskin as Literary Critic. London: Cambridge University Press, 1928.

Baynes, Thomas Spencer. "The Text of Chaucer" Edinburgh Review. July 1, 1870, Vol. CXXXII, pp. 1-45.

Bell, Malcolm. Ed. Edward Burne Jones: A record and review. London: G. Bell and Sons, 1893.

Browning, Elizabeth Barrett. Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Hitherto Unpublished Poems and Stories. Bibliophile Society, 1914, 2V.

________. Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning to R. H. Horne. Ed. S. R. T. Mayer. London, 1872. 2V.

________. Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning addressed to Richard Hengist Horne. Ed. S. R. Townshend Mayer, 1877. 2V.

________. Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1897.

________. Poetical Works. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1899. 5V.

Browning, Robert. The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Ed. Elvan Kintner. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969.

________. The Poetical Works of Robert Browning. Ed. Augustine Birnell. London: Macmillan, 1929.

________. The Complete Works of Robert Browning. Editorial Board: Roma A. King, Jr. and others. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1969; Cambridge edition, Boston 1895.

Bulwer, Edward. The Life of Edward Bulwer by his Grandson. London: K. Paul, Trench and Co., 1913, 3V.

Burd, Van Akin. Ed. The Winnington Letters of John Ruskin. Cambridge, Massachusetts: the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969.

Butler, Samuel. Samuel Butler's Note Books. Ed. Geoffrey Keynes and Brian Hill. New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1951.

Carlyle, Thomas. Past and Present. Ed. Richard D. Altick. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965.

Case, M. P. "Chaucer and is Times" Bibliotheca Sacra. Andover, Mass., April 1854.

Chandler, Alice. A Dream of Order: The Medieval Ideal in Nineteenth Century English Literature. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1970.

Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Ed. F. N. Robinson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957. Second Edition.

Chesterton, G. K. Charles Dickens. New York: Schocken Books, 1966.

Chew, Samuel C. Swinburne. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1966.

Clough, Arthur Hugh. Prose Remains of A. H. Clough. London: Macmillan and Co., 1969.

Collier, John Payne. A Bibliographical and Critical Account of the Rarest Books in the English Language. London: J. Lilly, 1865, 2V.

Conolly, Thomas E. Swinburne's Theory of Poetry. Albany: State University of New York, 1964.

Cooper, Robert M. Lost on Both Sides. Dante Gabriel Rossetti: Critic and Poet. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press 1970.

Craik, George Lillie. A Compendious History of English Literature and of the English Language from the Norman Conquest. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1897, 1885.

Craik, George Lillie and Charles Macfarlane. The Pictorial History of England. London: C. Knight, 1841, 1838.

Craik, T. W. The Comic Tales of Chaucer. London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1964.

Culler, A. Dwight. Ed. The Poetry of Tennyson. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1977.

Daiches, David. A Critical History of English Literature. New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1960. 2V.

Dickens, Charles. Bleak House. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1966.

________. David Copperfield. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1947.

________. Hard Times. New York and Toronto: The New American Library, 1961.

________. Martin Chuzzlewit. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1957, 1907.

________. Oliver Twist. New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1962.

________. The Old Curiosity Shop. London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1951.

Drinkwater, John. Swinburne, an Estimate. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1969, 1913.

________. Victorian Poetry. New York: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1966, 1924.

Dryden, John. Of Dramatic Poesy and other Critical Essays. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1962, 2V.

Eliot, George. Middlemarch. New York: New American Library, 1964.

Eliot, T. S. Ed. Literary Essays of Ezra Pound. London: Faber and Faber, 1954.

Furnivall, Frederick James. "Recent Work at Chaucer" Macmillan's Magazine, March, 1873, Vol. XXVII, pp. 383-393.

Gardner, Delbert. An "Idle Singer" And His Audience. The Hague: Mouton and Co., 1972.

Green, John Richard. A Short History of the English People. London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1960; New York: Dutton, 1960, 2V.

Green, Roger L. Ed. _Kipling, The Critical Heritage_. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1971.

Grennan, Margaret. _William Morris: Medievalist and Revolutionary_. New York: King's Crown Press, 1945.

Hales, John W. "Chaucer and Shakespeare" _Quarterly Review_, January, 1873, Vol. CXXXIV, pp. 225-255.

________. _Notes and Essays on Shakespeare_, 1884, pp. 56-104.

Hallam, Henry. _Introduction to the Literature of Europe_. London: J. Murray, 1847, 1837-39. 4V.

Hardy, Evelyn. _Thomas Hardy: A Critical Biography_. New York: Russell and Russell, 1970.

Hardy, Thomas. _A Group of Noble Dames_. New York: Harper Brothers, 1891.

________. _Jude the Obscure_. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1962, 1960, 1959.

________. _The Mayor of Casterbridge_. New York: Modern Library, 1950.

________. _Wessex Tales_. London: Macmillan, 1964; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964.

Hare, Humphrey. _Swinburne, A Biographical Approach_. New York/London: Kennikat Press, 1970, 1949.

Henderson, Philip. _William Morris: His Life, Work and Friends_. New York/Toronto/London/Sydney: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967.

Hume, Robert D. _Dryden's Criticism_. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1970.

Hyder, Clyde K. Ed. _Swinburne as Critic_. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972.

Johnson, Samuel. _Lives of the English Poets_. Ed. George B. Hill. New York: Octagon Books, Inc., 1967. 3V.

Johnson, Wendell Stacy. _Sex and Marriage in Victorian Poetry_. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1975.

Jump, John D. Ed. _Tennyson: The Critical Heritage_. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967.

Kipling, Rudyard. All the Mowgli Stories. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1936.

________. Kim by Rudyard Kipling. New York and London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1913, 1908, 1902, 1901.

________. The Collected Works of Rudyard Kipling. New York: AMS Press, 1970. 28V.

Landor, Walter Savage. Imaginary Conversations. Ed. Charles G. Crump. London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1891. 6V.

________. Letters and other Unpublished Writings of Walter Landor. Ed. Stephen Wheeler. London: R. Bentley and Son, 1897.

________. Poems. Ed. C. G. Crump. London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1909. 2V.

________. The Complete Works of Walter Savage Landor. Ed. T. Earle Welby. New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc.; London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1969, 1929. 16V.

________. The Poetical Works of Walter Savage Landor. Ed. Stephen Wheeler. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1937.

________. Works. Ed. C. G. Crump. London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1891. 6V.

Lowell, James Russell. The Complete Writings of James Russell Lowell. New York: AMS Press Inc., 1966. 16V.; Riverside Edition, 1871. 10V.

Lloyd, William Watkis. "Critical Essay on Troilus and Cressida" The Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare. Ed. S. W. Singer. London: Bell and Daldy, 1868; Chiswick: C. Wittingham, 1826. 10V.

Macaulay, Thomas Babington Lord. History of England. London: Longman, Brown, 1849-61. 6V.

Mackail, J. W. The Life of William Morris. New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1968. 2V.

Marsh, George Perkin. Lectures on the English Language. New York: C. Scribner, 1860.

________. The Origin and History of the English Language. New York: C. Scribner, 1862.

Maurice, Frederick Denison. On the Representation and Education of the People. London and New York, 1866.

Meredith, George. "On the Idea of the Comic Spirit" New Quarterly Magazine, April 1877, Vol. VIII.

________. The Works of George Meredith. Memorial Edition. London: Constable, 1909-1911. 29V.

Mill, John Stuart. "The Subjection of Women" Three Essays by John Stuart Mill. London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Millet, Kate. Sexual Politics. New York: Doubleday, 1970.

Milton, John. The Complete Poetical Works of John Milton. Ed. Douglas Bush. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965.

Miskimin, Alice S. The Renaissance Chaucer. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1975.

Morris, May. William Morris, Artist, Writer, Socialist. Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1936.

Morris, William. The Collected Works of William Morris. New York: Russell and Russell, 1966. 24V.

O'Hagen John. "Chaucer" The Afternoon Lectures on Literature and Art. St. Stephen's Green, Dublin, 1863-1869.

Owst, Gerald. Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1961.

Paden, William. Tennyson in Egypt. New York: Octagon Books, 1971.

Peters, Robert L. The Crowns of Apollo. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1965.

Prose of the Romantic Period. Ed. Carl R. Woodring. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961.

Robinson, Ian. Chaucer and the English Tradition. New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 1961.

Rossetti, William M. Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters. London: Ellis and Elvy, 1895. 2V.

________. Lives of Famous Poets. London: Ward, Lock, and Co., 1878.

________. Chaucer's Troylus and Crysede Compared with Boccaccio's Filostrato. London: N. Trubner and Co., 1873.

Ruskin, John. The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin. Ed. Helen Gill Viljoen. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971.

________. The Winnington Letters of John Ruskin. Ed. Van Akin Burd. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969.

________. The Works of John Ruskin. Ed. E. J. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn. New York and London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1903-1912. 39V.

Savary, Claude Étienne. Letters on Egypt. Trans. from the French of M. Savary. London, 1787. 2V.

Shakespeare, William. The Complete Plays and Poems. Ed. William Neilson and Charles Hill. Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1942.

Sharp, Amy. Victorian Poets. New York: Kennikat Press, 1970.

Shelly, Percy Van Dyke. The Living Chaucer. New York: Russell and Russell, 1968.

Smith, Alexander. "Geoffrey Chaucer" The Museum, January, 1862. Vol. 1.

________. "William Dunbar" Dreamthorp, 1863, pp. 67-72, 81.

Spenser, Edmund. The Complete Poetical Works of Spenser. Ed. R. E. Neil Dodge. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936.

Spurgeon, Caroline. Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion 1357-1900. New York: Russell and Russell, 1968. 3V.

Stevenson, Lionel. The Pre-Raphaelite Poets. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1974.

Stewart, J. M. Thomas Hardy--A Critical Biography. London: Longman Group Limited, 1972, 1971.

Swinburne, A. C. Essays and Studies. London: Chatto and Windus, 1872.

________. "Short Notes on English Poets" Fortnightly Review, 1880, pp. 208-210.

________. Swinburne as Critic. Ed. Clyde K. Hyder. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972.

________. The Age of Shakespeare. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1965.

________. The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne. Ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and T. James Wise. New York: Russell and Russell, 1965, 1925. 20V.

________. William Blake: A Critical Essay. London: J. C. Hotten, 1868; Ed. Hugh J. Luke. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970.

Tennyson, Charles. Alfred Tennyson. Hamden, Connecticut: Archon Books, 1968.

Tennyson, Hallam. Alfred Lord Tennyson. London: Macmillan and Co., Ltd., 1897.

Thackeray, William M. Vanity Fair. New York: New American Library, 1962.

The Letters of Emily Lady Tennyson. Ed. James O. Hoge. University Park and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1974.

Thompson, E. P. William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary. London, 1953; New York: Pantheon Books, 1977, 1955.

Thompson, Paul. The Work of William Morris. New York: The Viking Press, 1967.

Tomkins, J. M. S. The Art of Rudyard Kipling. London: Methuen and Co., Ltd., 1965, 1959.

Victorian Poetry and Poetics. Ed. Walter E. Houghton and G. Robert Stange. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968, 1959.

Vaughan, Robert. Revolutions in English History. London: J. W. Parker and Sons, 1861. 3V.

Viljoen, Helen Gill. The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1971.

Woodring, Carl R. Ed. Prose of the Romantic Period. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961.

Wright, Thomas. Essays on Archaeological Subjects. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1880. 2V.

________. The Life of Walter Pater. New York: Haskell House, 1969.

Yeats, William Butler. Ideas of Good and Evil. London: Macmillan, 1924.

________. The Trembling of the Veil. London: Macmillan, 1927.